

Once Olivia and I had gathered all the ingots of orichalcum, I used a few spells to deconstruct the temporary workshop. I considered keeping it, just as a place for resources and in the middle of nowhere, but I ultimately decided to return the area to its previous state as best I could.

Once we returned home, I took a break from work to check in with New Wave, mostly to see what they were up to. I managed to catch Lady Photon, Glory Girl, and Weaver on patrol, where we talked for a while. I was happy to hear that Weaver had quickly settled in, though that was probably due to her already spending most of her heroing time with New Wave already, even before we moved her over officially.

After talking to the trio for a while, learning that they actually planned on starting some patrols for nearby smaller cities, I promised my support if they needed it, at least when it came to tools and equipment. When they returned to their patrol, I returned to the forest. I really wanted to get the forge completed before the end of the day, so I could move on to other projects and avoid being interrupted by any news from the PRT.

Thankfully, I already had all the designs set, including all the rituals, enchantments, and more, written out and waiting for their individual stages.

The first step to the process was forming the core of the forge, the central vessel where almost all of the magic would be focused, and where the entire creation process would happen. This central core started with two crucibles, a vessel for copper and a vessel for gold. This is where the whole process would start, and where I would feed the forge. I would have liked to simplify it to a single spot for the metals, but the gold needed to be treated before melting, so it had to start at a different spot than the copper.

After the metal was melted and the gold was treated, it needed to be poured into a central chamber, but I needed it to pass through several enchantments first. I would do this by funneling the two crucibles through a single tube, which would mix the metals and ensure that every drop of it passed through several rings of enchantment.

The central chamber was where I would do the last infusion, the last, last step of aligning the liquid metal with the concept of solar energy and the sun. This would be a two-step process. One, the metal that would go around the central apparatus, forming its general shape and adding considerable mass, would be retualized into a storage and refinement vessel for solar energy. That energy would then be fed into the central chamber, which would contain the partially treated molten metal, turning it into orichalcum.

Finally, an ingot mold with a rapid-cooling enchantment would spit out as many ingots as I needed.

Building the parts of the furnace took just over four hours, starting with building the core pieces. Several bits were made with orichalcum, including the enchanted bands that encircled the funneling tube, as well as several infusion points built into the central chamber. Once all of the pieces were done, I ritualized a huge amount of metal for the solar storage portion.

Once I had everything put together, I used metal control to mold the large amount of metal around the entire apparatus, locking every piece in place. The end result looked like half an ellipsoid, as if someone had cut an egg in half along its smallest diameter and stuck four legs on it. It was taller than me by two feet, with two hatches on either side to feed it raw materials, and a larger hatch in the front that led to the central chamber. Also along the front, just under the front hatch, was a small opening where the cooled ingots would be pushed out once they were finished.

Most of the mass was built from the ritualized metal, which wasn't all too different from what I made my golems from, an infused, ritualized metal that shone like a dark brass.

Once the furnace itself was built, the final step was moving it into place and supplying it with solar energy. Several golems carried it to a newly made stone platform along the forest edge, while I stepped off the platform with Kali.

"Are you sure this isn't going to hurt or anything?" I asked, looking out into the dark forest.

"Kali already removed them from Kali's domain," she assured me. "You will not hurt me, Father-William."

"Alright, if you're sure..."

I made my way to the closest tree and used my druidcraft to slowly disintegrate it from the top down. Leaves and branches slowly began to dry up and decay, turning into mulch before they could fall. It was a plant-removal spell, something to remove trees without having to cut them down and drag them away. It took about five minutes to clear each large tree, and I quickly made my way through the forest, clearing an unfortunately large chunk of the area out, creating an artificial clearing.

Once I had taken down around forty large trees, I reached into a newly filled bag and pulled out a golden acorn. Along the further edge of the new clearing, I pushed the acorn into the ground and used druidcraft to slowly grow it until it rivaled, and then surpassed the trees around it. The tree itself had golden yellow leaves, with bark that glittered as you walked around it.

Similar to how I had made the iron oaks I used to build with, I had ritualized these acorns with orichalcum and several other materials, turning them into massive magical solar panels. As I planted each new tree, I entangled and fused their roots together firmly, ensuring they were all part of the same energy bank. When I had planted forty new, golden solar trees, I used more druidcrafts to guide the tangled roots to the edge of the new platform, where the forge was waiting. Slowly, I grew the roots up the legs and into the back of the forge, using my magic to fuse them together.

"Kali can feel it," she said, looking up into the golden solar trees. "They gather energy and feed it to the forge... and impressive creation, Father-William."

"Thank you, Kali," I said with a smile, looking over what I had built. "Feel free to drain away the energy off the top, especially when I'm sleeping. Just don't drain it down past a certain point."

"Thank you, Father-William."

Kali nodded, disappearing into the golden trees as I spent about ten minutes checking all of my work and waiting for the forge to charge. As I did, I workshopped a name for my first grand work. It was only a minor one, my first attempt born more out of necessity than inspiration, but it still counted, so it needed a name, as the information I had suggested that all grand workings needed a name. While I doubted it would actually mean anything, I had settled on the name "Solar Forge" by the time there was enough energy inside the vessel to run it through a test.

I quickly made some copper and gold, infused them, and dumped them into the forge. Just about a minute later, five new bars of orichalum dropped out of the chute, perfectly stacked and ready to use.

"Well... not bad for a single says work," I commented, mostly to myself.

I looked up to the sky, using the sun to judge the time. It looked to be late into the afternoon, the sun slowly disappearing through the trees, though I likely still had a few hours of sunlight. Despite that, I decided to call it an early day, as I had been active and working for more than thirty hours at that point. I was hopeful that the PRT would reach out soon, hopefully any day now, and that meant I needed to take the time I could before the massive anti-endbringer project began.

In the end, I went and got pizza, picking up Olivia on the way home.

Over the next few days, I split my time between my responsibilities in the city, and pushing the limits of my grand working knowledge, working on two more designs. They were significantly more complicated than the Solar Forge was, and while I was certain I could make them work, part of me was beginning to chafe at even the three levels of the subject I had unlocked. I knew there was so much potential for the grand working concept, but I was being hamstrung by how little I actually knew.

On the fifth day of the new cycle, I finally received a call from the PRT, inviting me to a meeting with Director Piggot and other PRT leadership. I agreed, of course, quickly finishing my usual tasks for the morning, before teleporting to the PRT headquarters. There, once I stepped inside, I was led directly to a meeting room, where Armsmaster and Director Piggot were waiting. There was also a large screen, on which a rather stern-looking woman was displayed, staring through as she sat behind a desk. It only took a moment for me to recognize her as Chief Director Costa-Brown, leader of the PRT.

"Arcanum, thank you for joining us," the Chief Director said. "Please, have a seat."

"Thank you for having me," I said simply, taking one of the seats opposite Armsmaster and Director Piggot.

I took a moment to look over the local director, noting that she was still covered in bandages, but she at least looked like she wouldn't fall over into pieces at a slight breeze.

"Arcanum, I will cut to the chase, since I'm sure you know what this meeting is about," the Chief Director said. "Your offer to arm an army of PRT vetted soldiers is both intriguing and worrying."

"Worrying how?" I asked, my eyebrows furrowed.

"Your abilities seem to defy many of the limitations thought to affect tinkers," she explained. "Your creations don't degrade, beyond your... exotic style, you don't seem to be limited to one concept, and your ability to mass-produce things is incredible. All of these, combined with an incredible knowledge base, make you a tinker more powerful than we have seen in a long time. That sort of power makes people concerned, even if you have given no real reason for them to worry."

I sat there for a moment, digesting what she said. I appreciated her blunt response, even if I found the topic unfortunate. Before I could respond, however, she continued.

"Despite that, your offer was discussed seriously, its merits and shortcomings heavily debated," she admitted. "Before we get into our eventual decision, however, could you describe exactly what you are offering in your own words?"

"I... I suppose. The foundation of my plan is to take a sizable fighting force, several hundred people at least, and start by giving them the same durability and strength enhancements I've offered the members of New Wave," I explained, gaining steam as I talked. "I don't have the exact numbers as I lack the resources to measure it properly, but I estimate it makes someone four or five times as strong as your average human, and significantly more durable. Keep in mind, this is an additive increase, so the base strength of the applicant does not matter."

"Understood," the Chief Director said simply. "Please continue."

"On top of the brute rating, I would also offer a standard load out of gear that would give the soldiers mover and thinker ratings," I said, nodding at her direction to continue. "I could also increase their brute rating further by offering protective gear. In all honesty, I could use the opinions of experienced parahumans, especially tinkers, as well as PRT officers. The breadth of what I can create is growing, but I freely admit I lack understanding of open conflict on a wide scale. I've also never personally been to an Endbringer fight."

"Your creations still had an incredible effect at Cannabera," Director Piggot said, Armsmaster nodding silently beside her.

"Thank you," I said, nodding my head in acknowledgement.

"Is that all?" Costa Brown asked. "We were told you had some sort of annihilation device?"

"The wand was just a proof of concept," I explained. "To prove that I had a weapon that could seriously harm an Endbringer."

"How long will it take you to develop that weapon into a better form?" She asked, leaning forward in interest.

"I already have," I assured her. "I could show it to you, but I would need Director Piggot's permission to draw a weapon."

"Granted," Piggot said with a moment's pause. "Just don't point it at anyone."

I nodded, standing slowly and turning towards the TV. I reached to my hip and pulled out my annihilation rifle, which came out of its small holster with the usual sound. All three of my audience watched closely, their eyes going wide as I casually broke physics, holding the rifle up and aiming upwards.

"This is an annihilation rifle, my personal weapon. The version I would design for these soldiers would be restricted so they couldn't be stolen, as well as other safeguards, but would likely look very similar," I explained, turning the rifle so that Costa-Brown would see the other side as well. "This is likely going to be the real limiting item, as it requires a more complicated process to make than most of my other equipment, but with enough work and resources, I can make it happen. It's just a matter of streamlining the process."

"I see. I look forward to seeing the weapon in action," Costa-Brown said, her face still hard and nearly expressionless. "Perhaps we could set up a live demonstration soon."

"Does that mean...?"

"Yes, that is correct," she said with a single nod. "We discussed it heavily, and while there were a few who greatly disagreed with the idea, many of us, including myself, believe that your record of success and your peaceful actions warrant a little faith. Your project has a green light."

I let out a long sigh, sagging down and sitting heavily in my chair. While I was determined to make this idea happen, with or without PRT support, having their approval and help would not only make it easier, but it would also make it significantly less complicated.

"Thank you, Chief Director, Director Piggot," I said, giving both of them a nod. "I can assure you that I will give this project my full attention."

"That is good to hear," the stern woman on the TV said, her look turning into a glare. "Be aware, Arcanum. If this turns out to be a scam or a trick, the PRT will react harshly. I hesitate to threaten a proven ally, but given the seriousness of what we are attempting and the potential trouble we are opening ourselves up to, I must make you aware that there *will* be consequences. Understood?"

"Understood," I said with a nod, stamping down the urge to react to her words by challenging her back. She was right after all, this was a risk for the PRT. "I am aware of the risks you are taking, and I am taking this very seriously."

"Good. Now, the first step to this venture is finding a location where the soldiers involved can stay and train," the Chief Director said, leaning back in her chair. "There are a number of empty military bases, we could...."

We continued to discuss the project for another hour or so before I eventually returned home, as the Chief Director needed to focus on her other duties. I returned home, an excited buzz in my chest as I started to prepare for the coming challenge.