

While I was eager to test out my new weapon, Kali would be very cross with me if I started vaporizing trees and boulders like a maniac. I was also running late for my morning duties, something I realized when I looked up to see that the sun was much higher in the sky than I had anticipated. I mumbled out a curse, quickly cast my anti-sleep spell, and spent about ten minutes cleaning up, not just myself but some of the mess I made around the compound.

When I was done, I teleported to the hospital, followed by a trip to the Docks community. Both places were happy to see me, though as usual I spent more time at the docks. The community there was thriving, with more people coming together for protection and stability. With the city the calmest it had been in years, perhaps even a decade, there were more jobs available for people, and I could already see the difference.

With more time, the community might eventually downsize or shift into an area focused on support, rather than shelter. I was looking forward to either result, since it would not only mean better lives for everyone but also indicate that my efforts had been successful.

While I was at the docks community, I mentioned that I was about to go test out the new version of my weapon to Olivia, and she immediately demanded to come with me. I wasn't exactly surprised, so I told her to meet me at the usual spot before lifting off and flying away, giving her a chance to disappear and change.

Flying, as always, was freeing and exhilarating. The fact that it was a thrust-based flight meant that I could dip and dive, accelerating greatly before flicking upward in a steep rise, gravity pulling at my body as if it wanted me to crash. Flying without an urgent destination was fun, and despite teleporting being easier, I made a silent note to myself to fly around more often.

Of course, I also happily admitted there was no chance I would enjoy it as much as I did, if I didn't have my enchantments. The same exhilarating dives and swoops would be absolutely terrifying if I didn't know I would survive the impact with nothing more than a bit of cosmetic damage.

As I finally reached my destination, having taken the long way twice, I landed in the alley. Crow was already waiting for me, her outfit set to a night sky look rather than the usual feathered crow look.

"So where are we going?" She asked. "You going cliché, or do you have something more original in mind?"

"What does that mean?" I asked, looking at her with a raised eyebrow, my staff and spellbook already in hand for the teleport.

"Cliché is the Boat Graveyard," she explained. "It's where everyone goes, or I guess it's where everyone thinks everyone goes to test out fancy flashy powers. Do I have to explain what original means?"

I rolled my eyes at her comment, not responding as I flipped through my spell book. That got a chuckle from Crow, who stood up from her perch and stretched.

"I guess that means cliché."

I resisted the urge to teleport us over the ocean and let her fall in, and instead returned to the forest, grabbed my newest creation, and then teleporting us out to the boat graveyard. We landed on one of the more stable boats, a relatively small vessel that was mostly level and not underwater. It was also where I would stand as I used my metal control spell to tear apart the other ships for transmutation. I had reinforced the smaller boat to hold up under the strenuous activity, as well as all the extra cargo I was gathering. All those large bricks of steel and iron added up pretty quickly, and stacking them on some rusted-out, barely stable boat was just asking to go for a very long swim.

"Okay, so here is the deal," I said, holding the weapon so she could see it. "This will *kill* either of us if we get hit in the wrong spot. Not only does it completely bypass our enhancements, but it also completely annihilates whatever it hits. There is no amount of magic that can regrow your heart fast enough if you vaporize it and a good chunk of your torso."

She now stares down at the weapon, her eyes going wide as she listens.

"If it grazes you, I can probably fix that, but snapping my fingers and getting your disintegrated arm back is off the table," I explained, waiting for her to nod before continuing. "Good. So, standard gun rules apply: the weapon is always loaded, never point it at something you don't want gone, and keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot."

I turned around, scanning the area, looking for a target. A few hundred feet away was a slab of hull, torn from one of the ships during some sort of storm or shift in the yard. It jutted up from the water about thirty feet, the small bay waves making it rock a bit as I watched.

"Alya... is there anyone around?" I asked, just before I put my finger on the trigger.

"No, there is not," She assured me. "I would have warned you if there was."

"Thank you," I said with a smile. "I would be lost without you."

A warm breeze washed over us, despite the fact that we were surrounded by cold waters. As it passed, I lined up my sights again and let out a breath before finally pulling the trigger.

The angry sound of too much energy being pushed through the air too fast, a sort of tortured, buzzing sound, echoed over the Boat Graveyard. A purple ball of spinning, roiling energy, as big as a basketball, fired out across the water. It slammed into the rusted metal hull and almost splashed against it, except that everything the energy touched vanished.

The annihilation of the rusted metal felt like it should have made a sound, something angry and screeching. Instead, it was silent, there one second, gone the next, all with barely a whisper and a slight woosh.

"Why... why is it silent?" Crow asked, sounding a bit unnerved. "I didn't expect that."

"...I think the annihilation magic is eating the air faster than the sound can expand," I guessed, scratching my head. "Or maybe it's erasing the idea of its own sound. It's a pretty powerful effect, not conceptual but still pretty powerful..."

"It's disturbing, is what it is," she responded, though her voice had returned to normal. "Like it goes against nature. My turn!"

I shook my head and carefully passed the weapon to her. She took it and aimed down the sights easily, aiming at the same chunk of scrap as I had. A second later, she pulled the trigger, and the same ball of annihilation energy fired out across the water, slamming into the metal. Again, there was no sound as a huge chunk of metal simply vanished.

"Huh... kinda boring to shoot with no recoil," She said, turning to hand me back the weapon. "You-"

Having shot at the chunk of metal twice, the chunk of rusted-out hull began to creak, its structural integrity failing. It collapsed towards us, splashing into the water, disappearing quickly beneath the waves.

"Was that...?"

"No, the metal just gave out," I said, shaking my head. "The annihilation magic is way too unstable to hang around. Half the problem is convincing it to stay together and not eat itself on the way to the target."

We passed the rifle back and forth a few times, testing its accuracy and its range. The accuracy was pretty good, with only some minor deviations at the end of its range limitations, which itself was around four hundred meters. I had to fly up into the air to test that, firing it downward at a distant scuttled ship.

We also tested it against the water around us, firing it downward about a dozen meters out. While the powerful magic had no issue eating its way through the metal hull, that's not how Endbringer flesh worked. And while I didn't have a real analog on hand, testing it against water could show how it worked against solid objects. Thankfully, it worked as intended, the purple energy vaporizing deep into the water with each blast of purple energy. The water would vanish, and more water would rush in, causing a splash to pop up.

When I was eventually satisfied with my tests, I sent Crow home with a teleport crystal, while I stayed back and shuttled home another few dozen chunks of old, partially corroded metal, harvested using my metal control spell. Having that around as a resource to convert into whatever I needed, even if it was at a barely usable ratio, had been incredibly handy already, so I intended to keep the forest compound stocked with compacted scrap whenever I could.

Now that I had confirmed my weapon worked, all that was left was to incorporate my previous safety features into the new design, as well as find a way for me to hold it. The standard model would have normal sling clips along the bottom, allowing the soldiers to sling the weapon over their shoulders, but I wanted something a bit more sleek and magical.

Using my skills and spells in leatherworking from my arcane focus crafting subject, I was able to make a brass-studded holster, which would attach perfectly to my belt. It was enchanted to not let anyone but me pull out what was contained inside, but the real trick was that it was significantly smaller than the rifle. The trick was my two levels of dimensional partitioning, which allowed me to expand the internal space of specifically treated and enchanted objects. It also meant that I could make the internal space a bit more flexible. Combining the two effects let me slide a meter-long rifle into a holster that was just a few inches over a foot.

The holster itself was almost completely sealed off, save for a hole just wide enough for the rifle's barrel to fit. I would push most of the rifle in through the hole, pushing the butt against it until it kind of just popped inside. This was another effect of the stretchy, softened space inside the holster. It also allowed me to pull the rifle out by a small loop I added, stretching the holster a bit before it popped out.

It was a crazy thing to watch, like a Looney Tunes moment made real. I was sure that, when I showed it to Olivia, she was going to curse me out for making impossible things. Still, it fit perfectly on my hip, opposite my staff, just small enough not to get in the way of anything.

I'm not sure how often I would use it outside of Endbringers, but it was nice to know I had it on hand, unlike the rest of the equipment, which I kept in a duffel bag, just waiting to hear back from Director Piggot.

By the time I finished my holster project, the day was starting to wind down. Kali had finished transforming the golems, save for those working with New Wave. So, as a final project of the day, I called ahead before teleporting over to the Dallons and the Pelhams, quickly improving their golems before sending them back. I also finished the process with all the guardians, infusing their frames one by one, which took a bit longer. After I was done with that process, I sat down around the fire pit to enjoy a slow night, the first one in quite some time.

I was just about to consider what I would be having for dinner when Kali appeared not far from me, her turning to greet me with a smile.

"Good evening, William-Father," she said, making her way to the fire pit. "Kali would like to show you something."

"Show me... Sure, what's up?" I asked, standing up and approaching her.

"Kali wants it to be a surprise," she said with a smile. "Could William-Father close his eyes?"

"Uh, yeah sure," I said, before matching my actions to my agreement, feeling her hand each out to take mine, leading me through the compound.

"William-Father has been working hard," Kali stated, giving my hand a squeeze. "Kali believes he deserves a reward."

"I appreciate that, Kali," I said honestly. "But it hasn't been terrible or anything, I do enjoy most of my work."

"Kali understands, Kali enjoys her work as well," she responded, both of us slowing to a stop. "Kali has had fun working on this, too. Open your eyes."

I cracked one eye, peeking out to see what Kali had done, before opening my eyes wide. Kali's personal garden, the one she tended most often, was, as usual, in full bloom and looked amazing. She had added a small fish pond, along with some boulders and other accents, transforming the whole area into something truly special.

What really caught my eye, however, were the fruit-laden trees. These were not the rapid-producing trees from the orchard, those were further back along the woods. These were the divine fruit trees, the fruit of which could enhance a person's body in various ways. After first unlocking the knowledge to craft these plants through druidcraft, I slowly filled Kali's garden with them, making them in small batches during breaks and free time. In total, she had nearly a half dozen species of these divine fruit trees, and three of them had lightly glowing fruit hanging from their branches.

"Kali, this is incredible," I said, looking at the Genus Locis' golem. "How did you get them to grow so fast? I wasn't expecting any of these to be ready before halfway through next month."

"They are in Kali's garden, in Kali's heart," she said, gesturing around us both. "Kali watched over them carefully, and fed them well."

"It seems my daughter is growing more and more powerful," I said with a smile, giving Kali a hug. "This is impressive work, I couldn't be prouder. Well done!"

Kali blushed and, after a long moment, pulled away from the hug. Together, we worked to pick two ripe fruits from each tree. The trees were full-sized, but they didn't produce much, a side effect of creating such potent fruit. In total, we had six ripe fruits: two apricots of clear mind, two muscle-refining pears, and two bone-reinforcing plums.

"Kali promises the others will be done soon," She said, sounding a bit annoyed. "Kali did not want to make William-Father wait any longer."

"Kali, this is amazing already," I assured her. "The other fruits will be ready eventually. Until then, I will happily enjoy these."

Kali nodded, and together we headed back to the lounge area where we both sat down. Technically, Kali would see very little benefit from eating the fruits, but there was no way I was going to not have her taste the fruit of her labors, literally. Besides, it wasn't as if they were actually divine fruits, that was just the name. We could always grow more.

Once we were settled, we took our first bites, chomping into the muscle-enhancing pear, juice exploding from it as we ate. The flavor was incredible, like the distilled and perfected taste of pears, like the most perfect, most ripe version you could ever imagine.

"Holy hell... Kali, this tastes incredible," I said, shaking my head. "The knowledge I have from druidcraft says nothing about enhancing the flavor, this is all you."

Kali blushed, but quickly took another bite of her pair.

Suffice to say, none of the fruits lasted very long, but each one was an incredible experience. Even as I finished, I was already looking forward to the next batch.

"You really outdid yourself, Kali," I said, feeling very full, despite only eating three small pieces of fruit. "Now..."

I trailed off as I yawned, standing up slowly.

"Now I need to sleep so the fruit can do its job," I said, stretching as the long day, and the slightly soporific fruit caught up to me all at once. "Thank you, Kali, I can't wait to see the effects tomorrow.

We shared another hug, before I made my way to my bed, all but dropping into it.