

With my hands returned to me, now better than ever, I wanted to immediately dive into my newest skill, arcane construction and crafting. I knew it would considerably increase the speed at which I could produce grand workings, and I even had an idea that I could use to test that. Unfortunately, since I was no longer an amputee, the PRT insisted that it was time to play diplomat. A great many people wanted to meet and shake hands with the man who was largely being credited with killing Leviathan, despite my attempts to spread the attention among a much larger group.

So, since I could now officially shake hands again, I was being drawn in.

I was very tempted to tell the PRT that I wasn't interested, though not nearly that polite, and that I had more important things to do than meet and greet some random dignitaries, including the President, especially because the PRT made no attempt to hide they were hoping to use me. Unfortunately for my free time, Legend personally visited and explained the situation.

"I understand you prefer to stay out of the spotlight," Legend had said, having found me while I was visiting the Docks community. "It's honestly admirable, quite a few heroes can be... enamored with public attention."

"It really wasn't just me," I pointed out. "I couldn't have done it without everyone's help. Yourself included."

"I know, and people do appreciate your attempts to make sure everyone is being seen for their efforts," Legend pointed out. "But your efforts were what made defeating it possible. Do you honestly believe otherwise?"

I aggressively rubbed my face and ran my hand through my hair. I then gave the charismatic hero an annoying look before gesturing for him to continue.

"I know it's not ideal, but this is about more than just shaking hands," the powerful hero continued. "Many of the nations that want to thank you are groups that rarely come to the table to talk. Every one of them who comes to shake your hand is an opportunity for us to form bonds. It could mean the difference between chaos and communication, which is even more important now that shipping lanes are looking to open up."

"... You're not expecting me to sing praises for the PRT?" I asked, fixing him with a raised eyebrow. "I'm happy to be honest, but I draw the line at lying or embellishing."

"That's perfectly acceptable," he assured me. "Leave the game to our diplomats. Just shake hands and be yourself."

"Myself?" I asked, more than a bit surprised to hear that.

"Of course," He said with a nod. "I know you don't keep much track of media, but you are well known as a level-headed hero, which I happen to agree with."

Reluctantly, I agreed to the meetings, though I made it very clear I wasn't going to be meeting constantly for weeks. The PRT could set up a few groups, spread them out, and keep them relatively short, and I would be there to shake hands and greet people with a smile, but I still had things to do. The daily crush may have faded quite a bit, but I still had to keep going if I wanted to be ready for the next Endbringer.

Legend agreed, assuring me that someone would be reaching out to me soon to explain a schedule. He promised they would keep it reasonable and that they would curate the list to keep it short. He then thanked me again for all the help, before we shook hands one more time, and he left to return to New York, where he was stationed.

For the next week, my schedule was dotted with meet and greets, nearly a dozen in total. I had to admit, it was interesting to meet some of these people, primarily the ones who were genuine with their approach. One of the most notable people I met was the Japanese Prime Minister, who thanked me for my part in killing the monster who nearly killed Japan.

He gifted me, on behalf of the Emperor, the county, an ancient katana, one made by the famous Masamune, and not the cape. It was considered a national treasure, and I was incredibly touched by the gesture. They also gifted me property, a small corner of one of their last nationalized forests. It was a rather blatant attempt to get me interested in their country, but considering that they were still struggling after Leviathan sank Kyushu, I couldn't exactly blame them.

I added them to a list of places that could use some help, which, unfortunately, was rather long.

Many groups tried to get me interested in their particular locations, and by the time I was done meeting and shaking hands, I owned several plots of land, as well as around a dozen gifts. Some of the gifts were items, but most were small, almost knick-knacks, to commemorate the accomplishment or to represent the debt they felt they owed me. It was largely symbolic, with the visitors from places that Leviathan actually attacked usually being the most heartfelt.

In between the many meetings, I was working on putting my newest subject to good use. While I had built several barrier generators in Brockton Bay, I had yet to design a full magical shield system, something that would surround the whole city in a protective barrier. That was a large project, something I hadn't quite been ready to tackle. Now, with my new subject and a lot more experience with large-scale grand workings, I feel much more confident.

Still, I decided to make a smaller version for the forest first, as a test and proof of concept, before making one for Brockton Bay. I also just wanted one in general, so this was the perfect excuse to build one.

With the constant breaks for the various meetings, it took nearly a week to complete, but if I had been working constantly, the final product would have likely only taken three or four days, depending on how determined I was to get things done.

In order to keep the forest clean, I built most of the structure underground, digging a large pit downward and filling it with an incredibly powerful grand working. I fueled it by peppering the forest with solar-absorbing trees, infused with Orcalcum, throughout the forest. They turned sunlight into mana, which was then directed into the magical capacitors built into the grand working itself.

When the capacitors were full, they would feed the magic into the forest itself, which would be absorbed, mostly by Kali, as it was her domain. This could keep the forest vibrant and alive while also significantly increasing Kali's growth rate.

While designing the structure, I was determined to make it as overkill as I could. So, it went a full ten stories down into the ground, but most of that was just storage for the magical capacitors. The amount of energy the working was capable of storing would allow it to deflect a truly ludicrous amount of energy.

I didn't know how it would handle something, say, like a nuke, but conventional explosives were certainly useless, or at least would be for several days of near constant bombing.

Before I could start to properly design a larger version for the city, one with multiple capacitors and projection points, it was time for my last meeting, this time with the President of the United States.

Unlike the President from my world, the President here was an older man from North Carolina. He was tall, with mostly grey hair, and looked like the kind of person who liked being the loudest one in the room. Joining me for the meeting was Alexandria, who met me on the ground, not far from the border of Washington DC. We would fly in over the city, probably so reporters could get a few snapshots of the well-known heroine and me flying side by side on the way to see the President.

I ended up teleporting to the PRT headquarters in plain clothes, making my way out of the city, and then getting changed. When I approached Alexandria, I waved.

"Arcanum, hello," she said simply, nodding, her smooth, reflective helmet face plate hiding most of her face. "Are you ready?"

"As I will ever be," I said with a shrug. "Any idea how long the President has set aside for us today?"

"The president has cleared a thirty-minute-long block for us," She responded. "He offered more, but I assured him that you are quite busy, already throwing yourself into your work, preparing for the next Endbringer."

The line was delivered so stoically that I couldn't tell if she actually thought that, or if she had said that as a favor to me so we could get this over with. The lower part of her face, which was visible, didn't give me anything to help figure it out either.

"Shall we?" She asked, and as I nodded, she took off into the air, traveling at what was, for her, a leisurely pace.

I followed her up into the air, flying alongside her as we crossed over the city. My assumption that the flight was a PR stunt was almost certainly true, as we stuck to flying over streets rather than taking a more direct route.

When we finally arrived, landing on the White House lawn, we were guided inside by the Secret Service. I followed behind Alexandria quietly, as while I wasn't too enthusiastic at meeting the President, after all, I barely considered him my President at this point, I did find it rather interesting to be inside the White House itself. There was a lot of history surrounding the building, and it carried a weight I couldn't help but appreciate.

Once we were in the Oval Office, the President gave me a short little speech thanking me for my efforts. We talked for a while, during which he made a subtle attempt to play to my patriotism, saying things like how glad he was that an American citizen would work so hard to help everyone. It seemed like someone had realized how many countries had been trying to drag my attention to them, and he wanted to remind me of my origins. He even made a rather nice gesture of signing over the entire forest I lived in to me, from the edge of the city all the way to the mountains.

Considering that Kali's influence was currently making its way over those mountains, and it would only get faster once the immense capacitors in the barrier grand working were finished charging, it was too little too late. There wasn't a person in the world who could contest my ownership of that area, with or without a piece of paper to back it up. Still, it was nice to have, so nobody could even try to evict me or something equally stupid.

It took a bit over thirty minutes for the President to finally wrap it up, the old man clearly looking to get his piece in before we could leave. Technically, it could be what you called a conversation, but the President clearly saw the meeting as a moment to instill me with some of his grand wisdom. His policies weren't bad, at least for the most part, but he was by far the most patronizing person I had met with so far.

When he was finally done, we shook hands one more time before posing for a photo op. I had to mentally stop myself from teleporting myself out of there the moment the man said, "It was nice to meet you," and the cameras stopped flashing. Instead, I followed Alexandria out of the building before taking off into the air.

As we took off, far enough that the Secret Service on the ground wouldn't be able to hear anything, Alexandria turned her head my way.

"Thank you for agreeing to this," she said. "Diplomacy and PR are not everyone's cup of tea, myself included, but it is necessary to keep the citizens from panicking."

"I understand, it's about the only reason I've been playing nice," I admitted, the stoic woman nodding her head in understanding.

"Before you teleport away, could you spare some time?" She asked. "I would like the chance to talk to you in a more private setting."

I resisted the urge to make a joke before nodding.

"I have some time."