January 21st 2016, Helton's Industrial Meat Packing Plant, West End, Gotham, 10:00 AM EST

Never underestimate how much you can get done with the proper application of money. Besides being a legitimate trading partner with the US with an actual embassy, Atlantis also apparently had several corporations operating under US names that they directly bankrolled. Some of them were in Gotham, and with nothing but a few calls, everything I asked for had been acquired and transported to my new lab in an abandoned meat packing plant.

"This is…nice," Rose said lamely as she sat up on a long metal counter in my new lab.

I snorted. "It's functional, which is better. I have quite a few new pieces of gear in mind to work on, not to mention I need to try to create an antidote to Bliss." I picked up a ream of paper. "These notes that Aunt Bonnie put together for me are nonsense and I'm not sure how I'm supposed to translate THIS into a physical concoction. But if I can do it, this is exactly the setup I'll need."

The entire plant had been cleared out, and everything but the middle area had been filled to bursting with…stuff. Just all the stuff. Buttons, knobs, levers, metal, plastic, wood, sequins, crystals, gems, and a bunch of jars of random magical stuff like ghost dust and elemental fog.

Despite how fancy and upscale it looked, it was mostly just trash. Everything in here was a fairly cheap item that was usable for creating other materials or that I could try to disenchant. Rather than ask for a bunch of legendary mats I couldn't fully use and would only waste, I'd chosen to go wide instead of tall. I had lots of plans for this stuff, but I wanted to work my way up the ladder so I had a proper understanding of what I was doing.

While I could brute force the ability to make high tier shit with overpowered materials, my experiments with mass production had taught me a lot about optimizing my Willpower usage and how much it could help me create a better item with what I had available. Even leveling up my skills only gave me knowledge and insight, the actual execution and details of my technique could still be improved beyond what even a max level version would give me.

On the downside, this meant a lot of the stuff I was making would be slightly better materials, and since most of those were Tin, they wouldn't net me any XP. But still, establishing a solid foundation was the most important thing.

Which was why I needed to focus my next round of crafting on preparing for this task. That meant less items to start and more potions. If I had any hope of translating something as abstract as the magic Aunt Bonnie had used to fix that goon into a liquid, I was going to need a deep understanding of liquid alchemy, and I'd been falling way behind on that.

I glanced over at the wall behind me. Part of the reason for selecting the meat packing plant (I'd been offered a few locations) was that it still had working refrigeration. Maybe of the ingredients

I'd requested were liquids, given this little mission of mine, and many of them needed to be kept cold. So I walked over to the refrigerators and stared at the shelves and shelves of different substances, considering what to try.

Figuring I should start out simple, I grabbed two gallons of milk, pulled some protein powder from my inventory, and snagged some calcium supplements from one of the shelves. I'd forgotten how good it could feel to freestyle my own mixes, and the sensation of just pouring things into the giant enchanted cauldron Mera had gotten me was almost euphoric.

After dumping out the milk I used Reduce until it was only about a bowl full, then I poured in the supplements and the powder. Following my instincts, I grabbed a bottle of antibiotics, and a bar of actual iron and threw them in with it. Then I hit it with Refine. Finally, I Synthesized the whole mess together, focusing it into a thick liquid before reducing it again to thin it out.

Holding out a bottle, I let the grey liquid pour into it, then used my Identify to figure out what I'd just made.

[Object found: Bone Boosting Elixir. Grade: Tin. Quality: Rare. A useful tincture that increases bone density and improves recovery in breaks and fractures. Value: NA]

Without access to the TIn store I couldn't sell any of this stuff directly. I COULD give it to Kate to sell, but my identify skill didn't bother giving me values for Tin grade items anymore.

Humming to myself, I grabbed more antibiotics, this time some amoxicillin, then some detox powder, some cleansing juice, and a ginger based immune boosting concoction, and poured it all into the cauldron. The thing was designed to gather magical energy from the surrounding area, purify it, and infuse it into the mix. That was why the bone elixir had been rare as opposed to uncommon like it probably should have been.

Rather than finish up though, I turned and grabbed another large pot, and I started mixing another liquid together. I wanted to try something I'd already tried once before, making a solid item out of a liquid to create a shard.

I filled the whole thing with water, then dumped in about five pounds of chamomile tea, which I Synthesized with the water to make perfect and extremely dense tea. I dropped in a few whole stalks of lavender from a nearby jar, a big chunk of camphor wood which I then refined into the water, and some peppermint. Once it was all in there, I reduced the mixture to about half its original mass, then refined the result. As it refined, I triggered Synthesize, making sure everything perfectly fused together.

[Object found: Serenity Shard. Grade: Tin. Quality: Uncommon. A fragment of inner peace. Value: NA]

I beamed. Then I carried the shard over to the cauldron, dropped it in, and triggered Synthesize again, focusing on Refining and Reducing it as I did. The liquid inside contracted, the shard dissolving into the substance as it shifted colors to a dreamy light blue.

[Object found:Mind Calming Draft. Grade: Tin. Quality: Epic. A vial of peaceful rest, calms the heart, relieves the burdens of dark worry. Value: NA]

I grinned, holding the vial up with a whoop of excitement. Rose, who had been napping nearby, heard me and woke up, looking bleary. “Huh, what happened? You do it? That was fast. Or slow. How long was I out?”

“Less that twenty minutes,” I informed her jovially. “And no, I didn’t “do it”. This is tin grade shit. No way I’m going to manage an antidote to Bliss with this trash. But what I DID manage was what I think might be an ingredient in my final mix.” I shared the details of my newest concoction with her, and she looked impressed. “Damn, you could probably sell something like that for a pretty penny.”

I stashed the vial in my inventory, already planning a new mix based around it. But if I was going to do that, I needed some other things. Iron potions, much like Iron items, required an active magical ingredient. A catalyst to make the item function at the proper level, not just my own energy. That was why I’d ended up with my new artificer skill: Disenchant.

Hence my requisitioning of a bunch of random magical knick knacks. Pushing the cauldron aside, I walked around and grabbed a bunch of minor magical items. Nothing like I’d make, more like magic kids toys and lamps and shit. I dropped them all on the table and focused on them, finally deciding to try out my newest class skill. I raised my hands and focused, triggering the skill, and just to get myself in the headspace, I even said the word out loud. “Disenchant.”

Willpower flowed out of me through my hands, into the item, and wrapped itself around the magic in the item. Permeating the field that imbued the object (a spinning top that didn’t stop spinning until you told it to), my Willpower grabbed ahold of the inherent magic and sort of…twisted.

Like someone popping a lock, the magic jerked, and the power holding the item together just dissolved. Like I’d removed the atomic bonds that held the top in one piece, it just sort of fell apart into a pair of piles.

One pile was glowing dust, the other a small orb of flickering light.

[Object found: Arcane Dust. Grade: Tin. Quality: Common. The powdered remains of a magical working. Value: NA]

[Object found: Lesser Magic Essence. Grade: Tin. Quality: Uncommon. A solidified essence of minor magic. Value: NA]

Smiling, I leaned down to pick up the essence. It felt weird, kind of insubstantial but also buzzing. I liked it. I also deposited the dust into my inventory. Too excited to stop, I started again, using Disenchant. And again. And again. Until finally I ran into a slight problem. Namely, my head pretty much split open and sent my brain flopping to the floor. It took me a second to remember the sensation.

“Mana drain,” I groaned as Rose popped to her feet alertly, having heard me grunt. “I’m fine, give me a second.”

[Disenchant (E) Level up! Disenchant (E)- Lvl 1- Lvl 3]

Disenchant, apparently, was NOT cheap. It cost me a hundred MP every time I used it. Regardless of anything else, my research would be much slower if I had to manage my mana, but I wasn’t too worried about it. I’d disenchanted a bunch of stuff, netting me a full three levels in the skill, but more than that, I’d managed to snag a material I could use. Two of them actually.

[Object found: Small Dream Shard. Grade: Tin. Quality: Rare. A solidified piece of dreaming thought. Value: NA]

[Object found: Light Illusion Dust Grade: Tin. Quality: Rare. A special material that captures thought as light and spins it into visions. Value: NA]

Both of these were going to be useful for my final mixture. I was sure of it. But as my mind recovered from the beating, I became sure of something else. I needed more than just power and connection. I needed an underlying structure. I needed something that could counteract the drug itself. I grimaced. I needed Bliss. And not a small amount either. I’d need to purify and experiment with it.

Stashing the dust and shard in my inventory, I stood up, stretching as I did. “Rose, you have connections in the underworld, right? More that just Willy?”

My bodyguard and sometimes fuck buddy had been snoozing, but at her name, her head jerked up. “I do…” she said slowly, looking suspicious. “Why do you want to know? Are you going to ask me to help you do something stupid?”

“Almost certainly,” I said cheerfully. “Why, are you going to turn me down?”

Rolling her eyes, she snorted. “Depends what it is. If I think it’ll help those kids…probably not. Why, what do you need?”

Thinking it over, I decided to just tell her. “I need to buy some drugs. Specifically Bliss. And probably a bunch of it. I didn’t realize I’d need it to make the antidote, but I’m pretty sure at least to make the recipe I do. Once it’s done, I should be able to recreate it with other materials, but for the development phase, I’m going to need a supply.”

Staring at me, her face darkened. “I…I’ll have to ask around,” she said uncertainly. “I don’t really run in those circles. You know this is going to be bad, right? Like I’m positive we’re going to see some terrible shit if we do this.”

“I know,” I reassured her. “But we do what we have to do. Find me a place buy Bliss, we can worry about the rest later. The longer we wait, the longer these kids are stuck out there with HIM.” She saw the determination on my face, stared me in the eye for a minute, then eventually nodded. Then she slipped off to make some calls, and I waited. I hoped I hadn’t just made a big mistake.