

Chapter 451 Displacing Circumstances

“Do you think it would even be beneficial? Compared to expensive steel? I have plenty of that as well,” she said.

“You shouldn’t underestimate bone. Especially procured from a monster like yourself. It might additionally be able to hold more powerful enchantments. Naturally, bone is better suited against many schools of magic, mana intrusion being one of them,” he explained.

“Great... we can test both I suppose,” she said with a smile.

Ilea continued to explain the need for a lesser blood manipulation agent as well as blood magic resistance training for herself.

The man agreed on both and followed her down to Iana’s stronghold.

Ilea decided to give him the benefit of the doubt and to trust him this far. He had seemed sincere in all their talks and his loyalty to Trian and his family was unquestionable.

The gates opened after she had knocked hard enough on the steel gates to send a pulse of mana through one of the enchantments.

The enchanters waited on the other side.

“Oh no,” Ilea said with a sigh.

“Stop it with the pity,” Iana said. “The runes you brought are fascinating... as are the machines... a marvel. It’s like a whole new world has been opened to us... truly. We fail to understand most of it quite yet but I am sure your discovery will lead to advancements in technology that will revolutionize the settled world,” she said, babbling out the words in quick succession with what seemed like a single breath.

Lost a rapper in you, Ilea thought and sent healing mana into the both of them. “It’s good to hear you can use the information,” she said. “Ready for the testing? We can do it tomorrow as well if you need to sleep a little before.”

Iana shook her head. “We’ve been planning for hours... no. Now is perfect. We can sleep later. I promise that we will, later today.”

Ilea looked at her with suspicion but nodded nonetheless. “Lead the way then. Also, Orthan will be experimenting with the blood manipulation agent I encountered in the north. Can you provide a secure environment within the Core?”

“Of course. Christopher, can you start with the first gate tests?” Iana said.

The man nodded as they entered the Core, both of them immediately activating a variety of enchantments.

Ilea dripped some of the corruption into a small glass container placed within a variety of enchantments she didn’t understand.

Orthan began his work immediately, occasionally asking for tools or resources, all of which Iana could provide.

“Now, just relax and tell me what you see and feel, both with your eyes and magic perception. Signal me verbally or with a lifted hand if the strain is too much,” Christopher explained carefully.

Ilea nodded and relaxed, her ashen armor covering her bone set. She was ready for whatever came.

The whole core sprung to life, magic lighting up in the sphere around her as it rushed through the enchantments and finally into the two platforms in the center.

A light thrumming noise was audible and even Orthan looked up from his work for a moment before he focused back onto the corruption.

Ilea felt the space around her fill with power, the area distorting. A heavy pressure started to form, pushing into her from all directions. Not enough to be a concern. The mana density kept increasing, focused on the center of the platform where she stood.

Something pulled on her left side, her arm lifting slightly without her intention. And then the magic faded.

“Are you ok!?” Iana shouted.

“You don’t have to be so loud,” Ilea said and quickly told them what she had seen and felt.

They gave it another shot with Ilea’s resistances deactivated, both arcane and space.

This time her arm was ripped out entirely.

Iana screamed and Christopher looked away.

“It’s fine, calm down,” Ilea said as she regenerated her arm and spit out some blood. The arcane pressure was rather powerful without her resistance. Her ripped out arm spoke itself for the space magic that happened. *Might be a way to train those resistances*, she thought.

Enchantments might not be sentient but neither was the blight or poison for that matter.

“Do it again and watch,” she said and once more retold what she herself had experienced.

The two modified a bunch of enchantments after five more tests.

“How’s it going?” Ilea asked Orthan as she joined him while the others worked.

The man looked up with slightly shaking hands. “Do you have any idea what this is?” he asked in a carefully controlled voice.

“An incredibly deadly agent that could wipe out all of humanity if it infects someone?” she asked casually.

He nodded. “Exactly... why did you bring it here?!”

“To get a weaker version... so that if something similarly powerful ever spreads, at least the Sentinels will be immune,” she explained.

“I see. I see. Yes... it makes sense. Still... this is outrageous... I have never seen or heard of anything this potent,” he murmured.

“It’s from a dungeon in the north, made by a being more powerful and ancient than I dared imagine. Even more important to prepare ourselves. Just in case,” she said.

Orthan just nodded in silence, continuing his examination as he took notes. "I will need blood... potent blood... and a variety of ingredients that I doubt you have available," he murmured.

"Would my own blood be potent enough?" she asked and held out a severed arm.

The man blinked before he hesitantly grabbed the limb, examining the blood. "It is," he said, as if he admitted something he regretted.

"Talk to Trian for the ingredients. I'm sure we can procure whatever you need," she added.

The man nodded and thanked her.

"Ready?" she asked and looked at Iana.

The girl swallowed hard and nodded weakly, her face a mask of uncertainty.

"I'm alright, don't worry," Ilea said and appeared on the platform again.

"Number six... enchantments version two point six, sequence start," Christopher said before the pressure resumed.

Ilea felt a pulling again, this time more central. As if she had issues with digesting. It was a little difficult to breathe as well. Nothing major.

She reported the findings and they resumed the test, once again with her resistances deactivated.

I wonder if someone with a third tier space resistance can even use teleportation like this, if it prevents me from being moved, she wondered before her innards vanished.

"Oh?" she exclaimed with the air that was left.

Her body recovered near instantly before she smiled. "Eh... my whole rib cage and stomach as well as nearly all my organs just straight up vanished. I'm not sure if that's the intention."

The enchanters both paled and looked at each other.

An hour passed, the enchantments modified several times in that span.

Ilea's suggestion to weaponize the space gun was dismissed by Iana, her explanation as to why that wouldn't work going above Ilea's understanding.

Dismemberment guns... or maybe... Portal? she thought with a smirk. *Johnson could do it with a box of scraps, in a cave. Or how did that go? Surely Iana could live up to the task.*

Christopher once again read out the next test sequence, by now looking visibly aged.

The magic activated and Ilea instantly felt the pressure built.

It climaxed and ripped out a section of her chest.

She reformed it and immediately looked over to the other platform where an unidentifiable sludge of red appeared and slapped to the ground, splashing blood and bone over the surface with a wet sound.

"YES!!" Iana exclaimed before she covered her mouth in shame, looking at the ground.

Ilea laughed out loud and waved at her. "It's fine. A marvelous success. The disembowelment gun will be quite the shocker!"

"I told you it's not possible to make it portable! Nor do we understand why this happens! Stop with the horrific suggestions!" Iana exclaimed, her shame immediately forgotten before she smiled.

"Come on, we have a lot to do. The connection was established successfully this time, let's work on the next version," she said to her companion.

"I have a class to attend soon but I'll be back again tomorrow," Ilea said.

"Of course... thank you for the assistance. It would be impossible for us to do all this without you, I hope that is clear," Iana said.

Christopher nodded next to her, a hand moving through his disheveled hair.

"I don't know many people that can easily recover from a ripped out chest either. That's why I'm here. And why you two work for me," Ilea said with a smile. "Glad we already made progress today."

Orthan sighed and stepped away from the cube holding the corruption. "I will need more time. I don't think it impossible however. It has been a while since I last worked on Blood Manipulation."

Ilea gave him a thumbs up and stored the glass container in her necklace. "Then you'll join us tomorrow again. If you don't mind?"

He nodded. "Of course. Don't mistake my terror for a lack of interest. I believe I should join your resistance training as well... what happens when someone dies to this substance?"

"What do you think?" she asked.

"They turn into a monstrous beast? Losing all sanity?" he suggested.

"Bingo," she said and pointed at him with both hands.

"What's bingo?" he asked, confusion apparent on his face, his gaze focused on the empty cube where the corruption had sat previously.

"A dangerous monster that feeds on the boredom of men. Hope you never encounter it," Ilea said and ushered him out. "See you two tomorrow!"

They waved and continued their work.

"Also sleep, or I will make you," Ilea added as the gates closed behind them.

"You are relentless," Orthan said with a smile. "And here I thought I was a strict instructor."

"I don't want them to be consumed by their work... doesn't seem healthy," she said.

"It is their passion, their joy. What else is there in life?" he said.

"Doesn't help if they die of exhaustion," she murmured. "You can join the class if you want. Trian agreed as well. The Faculty is free to participate. If they can stomach the pain."

Orthan considered it for a moment before he nodded. "I will join but I might not be able to go through with it."

Ilea shrugged and entered the unfinished training hall on the sixth floor.

She was a little early, or only a fraction of the students showed up for today's lesson. "Are we early?"

"I believe so," Orthan said and stood with some of the students.

They looked at him and each other but nobody dared to murmur. Too few of them were there to reasonably hide it. Not that it would make a difference to Ilea's ears.

Perhaps to Orthan's but she had a suspicion that the old man was quite perceptive.

So close to level two hundred but he didn't push through. Either he leveled when he was already quite old or he chose to not increase his lifespan any further.

Ilea decided that she didn't care enough to risk a complicated talk. He was free to do whatever he wanted in those regards.

Hmm... don't plan to just stand here today and watch them train, she thought and blinked to the farthest walls. It looked more like a cavern, unfinished and barely resembling something man carved.

She used a single ashen limb to scratch a variety of targets into the most even surfaces, using her wings to reach the higher up parts of the wall. *That should do it,* she thought and glanced back to find most of the students had arrived by now.

There were about as many as the day before. *Doesn't seem like a steady decline at least. That's good.*

Ilea landed and greeted everyone, quickly commencing with where they had left off on their previous day.

She used her heavy bow to fire some arrows at the targets she had set up. Her enhanced Eyes of Ash only added the benefit of knowing just how inaccurate her shots were. With time it would surely turn into a benefit too.

She added spears and arrows of ash that were shot from where they came into existence into the mix, finding them a little more accurate as she didn't have to manually aim them with her bow. The lack of string helped too.

The students in the meantime endured her ash attacks, blood manipulation and the occasional shock from Trian.

Ilea finished with a session of meditation and literal soul searching. She could tell there was something, her essence. It proved a massive struggle to even grasp its edges however. *Practice and time,* she told herself and aimed another arrow at one of the targets.

A few of the students reported both levels in Mental and Fear Resistance. The strain on their minds must have been palpable.

She assumed it had to do with students overcoming their previous fear of the training, joining again when they stayed away on the previous day. The Mental Resistance was welcome but a little worrying too. The strain she put them under was so much as to evoke it as a necessary growth.

It's the first hurdle... they're only getting stronger, she tried to steady herself, her healing continuously flowing into all of them.

Ilea watched them grit their teeth, fighting against the corruption that ate into their bodies, against the ash that sliced into their flesh.

She could feel the fear, the distress, and the pain. Each expression was a little different. Furious for some, determined for others, fearful and resilient or even joyous. Whatever it was that drove them, it kept them here. Made them endure. And she was proud. Of each and everyone of them.

You will grow to become Sentinels yourself, able to protect and heal those you call your own.

The training ended without a major incident, the students leaving exhausted but not quite as terrified as they had been the previous days.

She watched them leave through her sphere and aimed yet another arrow.

‘ding’ ‘Heavy Archery reaches lvl 6’

The message made her miss the target, appearing in her mind as she aimed. An eyebrow quirked up when another message appeared.

‘ding’ ‘You have learned the General skill: Sage of Torment – lvl 1

Sage of Torment – lvl 1

You have reached strength through pain and struggle. With time they have become companions on your way to power. As long as you train those willing, they shall find comfort and resilience in your presence. You are an example of what is possible, through sheer tenacity. Also, you inflict a lot of pain.

Ilea sighed at the message before she shook her head. *I have become a torturer, haven't I?*

She wondered if her actions were any different from the Dark Ones she stopped back in Lisburg. The subjects were willing and the benefits were obvious. She wasn't looking for information out of an already defeated foe. She wasn't inflicting pain for the sheer sake of it.

Well, to an extent she was but only to ultimately make them immune to its effects.

The existence of skills really fucks with ethics, doesn't it?

She sighed again and reminded herself that the students were here by choice. That she was in fact helping them acquire necessary skills in a safe manner.

“Doubting yourself?” Trian asked as he joined her. “For what it’s worth... I focused on it today. The reaction of my mind was soothed by your healing. I am almost certain. It’s different with you here. Your magic provides both warmth and security.”

Don't want to know what kind of skill that will grant me, she thought with a smirk.

“I’m okay. It’s not a forever thing either. As soon as they have Pain Tolerance in the second tier, we can really start,” she said.

“A few are already above level ten. I doubt somebody could normally take that without heavy damage to their brain. Not without the kind of healing your provide,” he said.

“Time and therapy can heal some wounds,” Ilea said.

“Neither of which is usually provided,” Trian said and winked. “How did the testing go?”

Ilea walked towards the exit. “Managed to teleport some of my innards. An absolute win, I’d say.”

“Sounds unpleasant,” Trian said and glanced back at the hall. “Not as unpleasant as the chamber of agony.”

“That the official name?” Ilea asked.

The man chuckled lightly. “I overheard it. Testing grounds is another one. A little more positive. Hall of tears might be my favorite but I admit it is less fitting.”

“Huh, didn’t take you for a poet,” she said.

Trian glanced at her with an unreadable expression. “If you take that as poetry, I pity your reading habits.”

She just waved him off. “I like fun stories. I’m not much for the finer arts of reading.”

“You should try. It is rather enlightening. Makes you truly appreciate the wording and hidden implications in contracts. The terrifying power of Claire will only reveal itself through such a lens,” he explained.

“I prefer to stay ignorant. She is capable enough as it is,” Ilea said. “Do you know if Dagon is in Viscera?”

“Planning to visit? He should be. They barely ever leave their library these days. Not that I know much about his time management before the demons,” he said with a smile.

“At least Elise didn’t change much,” Ilea said and grinned. “Did we ever get any trouble because of that by the way?”

“Not so far. The Empire is busy as is. I am sure the Library of Souls is shouldering a part of the work. With our independence, it will be difficult for them to demand anything. Especially people,” he said.

Ilea nodded. “Let’s hope they never try. For their sake.”