

## Chapter 447 Truly Enchanting

The girl had bags under her eyes, scribbling on a massive sheet of paper with a pen, Christopher commenting on some of it from the side.

“Hello,” Ilea said as her and Trian joined the two, the enchantments keeping this section secluded and closed off briefly deactivated to let them pass.

Iana looked up from her work, barely meeting her eyes. “Oh... you’re back.”

“Yes. And you look like you need a break. I don’t want to lose you two to overworking. Burnouts are a thing, you know?” Ilea said.

She formed an ashen table and placed some food and water onto it. “Come on, maybe some healing will help too.”

“It does feel pretty nice,” Iana said as she took a deep breath, focusing on the healing mana that flowed through her.

“This is from the Golden Drake right?” Christopher asked, piling his mouth with food.

“Yeah, Keyla is a fantastic cook,” Ilea said and smiled.

He nodded and grinned.

“You say that like it’s a curse.” Trian said, sitting down on a chair as he too ate some lunch.

“In a way it is,” Ilea whispered, closing her eyes as she chewed on a bite, savoring every bit of it.

“We haven’t succeeded yet,” Iana said, looking down as she delivered the line.

Ilea shrugged. “You have. I heard about the device you made for Claire. To communicate between cities. It’s going to help immensely. And I assume it’s also a step in the right direction in regards of the teleportation gate.”

“It is,” Christopher said. “Though there are missing links. Moving mana to a location predetermined proved difficult but not impossible. This... this is an entirely different task.”

“Doesn’t help that our test subjects aren’t exactly cooperative,” Iana said with a sigh, continuing to eat.

“We use rats,” Christopher said. “They... have met unfortunate ends.”

Ilea chuckled. “It’s always rats, isn’t it? I can be your test subject.”

“We are dealing with fluctuating arcane and space magic, runes and enchantments that are highly experimental. It would rip you apart,” Christopher said and shook his head.

Trian smiled. “Don’t encourage her.”

Ilea looked at him and winked. “I have third tier space and arcane magic resistances. I doubt whatever you created can seriously hurt me. And if it can... all the better. I need better skills anyway.”

Christopher looked at Iana and back to Ilea.

“Are you sure? We heard that you have returned even stronger than you were but this is not something to take lightly,” Iana said.

Ilea could tell the girl was excited. Finally presented with a potential solution to a problem she hadn't yet managed to solve. “I'll be the judge of that. There are some other things I wanted to discuss. I'll take part in whatever testing you need tomorrow... hmm a little before noon if that is acceptable for you.”

“Of course! We'll prepare everything we need. Trian, is it possible for you to come as well? We might need some mana to start some of the enchantments.” Iana said.

Trian nodded. “Of course. I'll be there.”

“Perfect, perfect,” Iana said, lost in thought.

“What else did you need?” Christopher asked.

“First off, do you two need more enchanter or rune experts? I'm sure we could hire some,” Ilea suggested.

“Christopher has looked through many potential people but it would cause more harm than use,” Trian said. “If you find any good candidates outside of Ravenhall, send them to me if interested.”

“I see. As for the other things. Maybe these things will benefit you in some way,” she said and summoned the notebook of the Tremor guard captain she had requested from Maro before he departed back to Hallowfort.

Ilea made it clear that these runes were to be treated with the utmost secrecy and respect, retelling bits and pieces from both her experience with the Soul Rippers and the Ascended.

She added the machines she had retrieved from the seventh layer in the Descent. The two reacted to both the runes and machinery in a way a puppy would treat something new and unexpected.

*Did I just doom Ravenhall?* Ilea asked herself with a sigh.

“It's alright,” Trian said and lightly punched her arm. “We have protocols in place. The benefits outweigh the risks. Marginally but they do,” he reassured her.

“We will be careful. There are many layers of enchantments in place around our testing facility as well as the very room you are in to prevent tracking spells, mana leaking and even divination,” Iana said. “The benefit with powerful high level beings is that they often focus on brute strength, lacking understanding of such matters entirely.”

“Not the Ascended,” Ilea said. She was sure of it and made that clear.

“I also have something else that I would like to show to the two of you. I suspect it might be better if we go very far away from the city or into the testing facility you have mentioned,” she said.

“What is it?” Iana asked, her eyes glowing with runic magic.

“A key. One of twelve Taleen keys made to unlock... something. I found it at some point but deemed it to dangerous to mention so far. Perhaps now is a good time, now that you have studied the gate key. I can show it to you now, for a couple minutes. That thing however, stays with me. I can show it to you again tomorrow.”

“Follow me,” Iana said and walked off, activating various sets of enchantments that made the ground glow, stairs forming in the solid stone, leading downward as a soft blue glow of magic light illuminated the side walls.

“Anything you can learn from it is excellent of course but I would also like to have a tracking device made so I can find the other keys. The Fae mentioned something along those lines should be possible,” she explained.

“Why do you want to find them?” Trian asked.

“You lack a sense for curiosity,” Iana said to the man as she released the most powerful and nearly blinding set of enchantments Ilea had ever seen. Both within her sphere and without.

“This... is the core,” Iana said as she waved them inside.

It was a rather spacious hall with a sphere like shape, seemingly floating bridges leading towards two platforms. Each had what looked like a circular teleportation gate built onto them. The materials used in the construction of the facility were various metals and wood. Neither looked common.

The whole place reminded Ilea a little of the dome structure on the twenty fourth layer in the Descent. The difference was that that one was covered in runes. This here seemed more intricate, complicated. At the same time the dome had been simple, raw. Perfect perhaps in the purpose it served.

“This looks fucking expensive,” Ilea said.

“It was,” Trian nodded. “You are Very rich.”

“I’ve been told,” Ilea nodded. “As to why I want to search for the keys, mostly to figure out more about the Taleen and what they left behind. You’re aware of all the machines. Right now they seem to have the goal to hunt and kill Elves.”

“And that’s a bad thing?” Trian asked.

“Partially. Some parties I have come into contact with would be very interested in stopping the assault. Yes. Elves. Not all of them are absolute monsters. I however am more interested in the potential of using all those machines. Or at least taking over production facilities. The keys might hold secrets that could lead us towards such a goal,” Ilea explained.

Iana shook her head. “Taking over Taleen machines... you know that Aki is a special case. We could not reproduce him. I’ve decided it is more reasonable to focus on the gates instead of him for the time being.”

“That’s the right decision anyway,” Ilea said. “So this place is safe?”

Iana turned around, her eyes glowing within her sphere for a brief moment before the gates closed. Several heavy stone and steel ones, a thrumming sound of energy activating right after.

“Now it is,” she said with a smile and quickly went to a small bunker like room nearby, placing the diary and the machines inside, summoned from the ring she had received from Ilea.

*Quite proud of all this, hmm?* Ilea thought. She didn’t see the problem with it. It was indeed an impressive installation. Her sphere couldn’t penetrate. Even Sentinel Huntress apparently got confused. She could still tell that there were two marks out there but there were no directions.

*Guess this is as good as it gets.*

She summoned the Tungsten key and placed it on top of an ashen altar she quickly formed.

Iana took a step towards the thing and just stared at it. Christopher walked around it and activated a few spells with unknown effects.

“Remarkable...,” he said.

“Is it?” Iana asked. “It is covered in enchantments that serve a similar purpose as this very facility. Below... the... no. I see...,”

“You see it too. She is right. One of many. Twelve seems unlikely... impossible even,” Christopher said.

“How reliable is this Fae?” Iana asked.

“It is older than perhaps humanity itself. Witnessed perhaps the forming of this realm itself. A mind compromised of hundreds if not thousands of individuals, all with experience and knowledge that likely transcend a genius human mind. Some are a little more dense of course. The source however, I think you can trust,” Ilea replied.

“We will treat it as the accepted theory for now. This... key, as you call it. It is indeed a piece of a larger puzzle. Some of these enchantments are incomplete,” Iana explained. “I would be very much interested in finding the rest, just to see what it looks like. However, as it is, this likely won’t be of use for the gates.”

“I agree,” Christopher said and sighed. “I would still like to study it whenever you are here. There are some obviously protective enchantments here that I have not seen before.”

“Sure, knock yourselves out. Iana, maybe as a day off project, I have a house near the ocean. Thought about securing it against potential looters and intruders. Make it harder to find or something. Maybe you can help?” Ilea suggested.

“Of course. That actually sounds like a good distraction. Maybe Christopher can come as well. Whenever you have time. I’d just like to study the runes and machines you have brought. And do some testing with you and the gates. If that is agreeable?” Iana said.

“Sure. It’s not a priority. Just something on my list. The house has pretty much been unprotected except for the group of Swordmouth tigers in the nearby cave,” she said.

“Swordmouth... tigers?” Christopher asked and glanced at the group with slight concern.

“You are standing in a room that holds teleportation gate prototypes. With two Shadows,” Iana said and smirked.

He waved her off. “I haven’t fought a lot of monsters, alright? They can reach rather high levels.”

“I will be there to protect you of course,” Ilea said.

“Creatures like that are no concern for a Shadow?” Christopher asked with interest.

“I have fought Elementals. No. Swordmouth tigers are not a concern,” she said.

Ilea looked at Iana and continued. “Have you three talked about potentially teaching some students about enchantments?”

“We did,” Iana said. “It isn’t a top priority at the moment. Claire suggested to focus on the gates and Trian agreed. The potential to support Riverwatch or the Empire in the war would place us at an entirely different stage in human affairs. If you want us to teach, we can do that as well. I plan to enchant the future gear of the Sentinels and teach on the basis of that process. Father has some ideas but we haven’t decided on a model yet.”

Ilea nodded. “That sounds like a good plan. And I agree with you. Focus on the gates first. Balduur is in Morhill now, right?”

“He is. Should I contact him for you?” Trian said.

“No. I’ll visit myself at some point. He has plenty of work to do anyway. Our students don’t exactly need equipment quite yet,” she said.

“Agreed,” the man said.

“Speaking of equipment though... I’ll have to talk to Orthan later this week. He’s a bone mage, right?”

“Blood and bone,” Trian confirmed. “Why are you grinning like a lunatic? Oh no... don’t tell me?”

“It’s just an idea, don’t shit your pants. It’s safe, trust me,” Ilea said and winked.

“Your choice,” Trian said and smiled as he shook his head.

“Iana, you upgraded Aki a little?” she said, changing the subject.

The woman nodded. “Improvements... protective alloy layers based on how much he could handle before his speed would suffer. His blades should be quite a bit more deadly. The main thing is a slow self repair enchantment. The way Taleen Machines gather ambient mana is a mystery to us and while Aki can use this ability, we have as of yet failed to understand the technology behind it. However, it enabled some quite ridiculous possibilities. Like said self repair.”

“Why didn’t the other Taleen machines have something like that? If it can be fueled by ambient mana,” Ilea said.

“I would assume it is a simple question of cost and efficiency. Perhaps there were not enough enchanters to supply all the machines,” Iana said.

“Or the levels were not worth it,” Ilea suggested. She hadn’t done extensive testing with machines higher leveled than Centurions. Even Praetorians had an implemented self destruction integrated, meaning the Taleen cared more for their technology’s concealment and the destruction of their enemies instead of the safety and recovery of their machines.

“It would be interesting to have that tech as well,” Ilea said. “Keep working on that too as soon as some time slots open up.”

“Of course. The city’s defenses would benefit greatly if we didn’t have to charge the enchantments from time to time. Let alone the equipment we could provide. Self repairing and inlaid with various spells and projectiles,” Iana said.

“High level skills and classes will prevail nonetheless,” Trian said.

Ilea nodded. “Of course they will. The existence and availability of such equipment would lead more people to such classes however. And it would provide quite a bit of security for low level people in the wild.”

*Like guns did for us.*

“Your class is starting in around two minutes,” Trian said.

“Ah yes. When did you become a living clock?” she asked, taking the Tungsten key back into her necklace. “I trust you two, I hope that is clear. I simply think it would attract more attention than all the other things you have down here.”

“I understand,” Iana said. “Your concerns aren’t invalid either. The key being a part of something bigger also means there might be connections that we can’t necessarily detect or prevent. A spacial item like your necklace is one of the safest bets we have.”

“It was nice seeing you again. And thanks for all the new toys,” Iana said, touching Ilea’s arm lightly.

“Thanks for all the additional work,” Christopher said, avoiding her eyes as if he regretted the joke.

“Shut it, we both love it,” Iana said with a smile.

“I do hope that’s true. Talk to Trian if not. See you tomorrow,” Ilea said and walked towards the opening gates.

“Until then,” Iana said.

Ilea and Trian teleported back up to the seventh layer.

“That was quite fruitful. Thank you for providing all of that,” Trian said as they reached the closed off section of the stairwell.

“I have no use for runes, nor much interest in the matter. Perhaps some day,” Ilea mused.

“You can take the afternoon off if you want to. Maybe grab some food and enjoy the city? Or the mountains?” the man suggested.

“I’m okay, Trian. I will let you know when I need a break. Training the students is part of the step I am taking. Plus, I find it quite enjoyable. Not constantly working on my own skills and power for a change,” she said.

“I agree. It brings a different kind of satisfaction. Every new revelation, skill and level a major milestone at their stage,” Trian said with a smile.

“Don’t get too used to it. I’ll help you get to three hundred soon enough,” she said with a smirk.

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Nathan couldn’t quite believe that he was still here. That he had chosen to return to this afternoon class. Two people were notably absent. He had counted.

They had remained in their respective rooms.

He certainly understood them. And still, there was something about all this. Something exciting. They were part of something special. *That's what all the cults and orders tell you, that's how they get you.*

Nathan reminded himself that the first encounter with Lilith was her basically openly having them tortured. She had answered their questions and concerns in an honest, almost comical way. The results however were there.

Skills he hadn't had before. It was worth the pain he would have to endure. He gulped. It had to be. This was his chance of becoming something more. To make a difference. *Like dad used to say.*

"Is she not coming?" Luke whispered behind him.

Most of the people were quiet, some shaking. He didn't know if it was fear or excitement. Aftershocks perhaps.

"She said she would. She will," Celeste commented.

"You should get used to disappointment, girl," Lorelei said, the older woman casually standing around with a mug.

"I grew up in the gutter, lady knight," she said in a mocking tone. "This place is anything but disappointing," she added and smiled.

"Here we go. Hello again. I see nearly all of you have chosen to come back into the hall of pain and blood!" Lilith exclaimed after she had suddenly appeared.

Trian stood close by.

"So, ready to be sacrificed in a blood ritual?" she asked.

Nathan glanced around, unsure how to react. *She's joking.*

Celeste chuckled. Some others did as well, not all of them as casually.

"I'm kidding of course. Kind of. Today we will start with something called Blood Manipulation. The potential dangers and how to get rid of it," Lilith said as a glass container suddenly appeared in her arms.

Everyone remained silent. *A storage device and not even a murmur. I like where this is going.*