

I started this ritual expecting worse results, so I am quite content with the outcome, even if I hoped for more. The Diadem did, however, become exalted tier, even if it's on the lower end of the tier, and it did achieve what I wanted: a huge power boost to my clones, and connecting my weapons to the Diadem.

I put on the diadem and stored the weapon inside it. Each clone may get a copy of them, but I can still use the original weapons.

"The ritual worked!" Kayafe congratulated me.

"Yes, now I am ready to power level my Classes!" I celebrate with her.

I needed this power boost, and it helps defend my mind now, a weakness I have neglected. But, despite my not knowing *why* it works, I now know that rituals can be used to upgrade magical items. I assume it can fail to upgrade a magic item if the ritual is too weak, but that is something I will have to test at some other time.

Rituals are probably something I will have to fail at to learn anything, assuming the magic will cooperate. Magic is chaos, so it's entirely possible my test rituals will show exaggerated or under-exaggerated results. Attempting to fully understand it may be a fool's errand. However, as long as I account for that possibility by making the tests as blind as I can...

I discuss this train of thought with Kayafe.

"So you want me to come up with rituals and have you cast them?" Kayafe asks.

"Yes," I answer. "If magic is ordinarily dangerous to do because it is chaotic, then it's possible that casting rituals for the purpose of study may show exaggerated results. So the goal for me is to cast rituals which I know the absolute minimum of"

"So you're worried that a ritual cast, with the goal of understanding rituals, will have inconsistent results? I had assumed it worked a little more like [Manipulate Magic] where we are in control under certain conditions, but your concern is warranted." Kayafe pauses for a moment as she adopts a thinking pose, and after a minute of thought, she continues.

"If that's the case, then I should mix experimental rituals with practical ones, so you don't know the purpose of the ritual either."

"Good Idea!"

I am reminded of a scientific experiment from my past life, the double slit experiment; this sounds similar to it. It will be interesting to know if knowing the purpose of the ritual will have any effect on the outcome.

With that settled, I tell Kayafe about how items and materials can only hold a certain amount of magic, or more specifically, the mana inside of them, since [Manipulate Magic] can't be applied to non-mana materials.

"Is it a certainty that it is based on how much mana is present in the materials?" Kayafe asks.

"I don't know," I reply with a shrug and a swish of a tail. "It was something I noticed during the ritual; I didn't have time to experiment. I thought you would know or suspect something."

"I didn't have [Manipulate Magic] for long before my adventure with my companions ended, and I didn't pay attention to how long the magic I applied to items lasted, so, unfortunately, this is something I don't know about either." Kayafe sighs and gets a far off look.

"Kayafe!" I get her attention so she doesn't get lost in thought. "It doesn't matter if you didn't test it before; it just means we experiment with it together!" I say cheerfully, trying to cheer Kayafe up.

"You don't have to worry about me," Kayafe replies with a soft smile. "But thank you."

"In addition to the magic stuff, there's one more thing I noticed, and we can quickly try it out."

"What's that? Kayafe asks.

"Watch closely" I grab some mana between us with [Manipulate Magic] and transform it into the ritual mana matching the pebble-sized sample in my hand. The mana instantly shifts back to its normal element, but Kayafe should have noticed what I did.

"Hmm? Did it transform back on its own?" Kayafe asks, putting a hand on her chin.

I nod. "I was just testing to see if it would, but it confirms that ritual mana can't normally exist. But now I want to see—"

"If [Manipulate Magic] will work?" Kayafe finishes for me as if she is on the same wavelength.

I nod and try again, this time imbuing magic in the ritual mana, and I smile with glee as the mana remains stable! This means that we can make more ritual mana! Well, as long as we have something to work off of and the stabilizing magic will only last a couple of years so nothing long-term should be made out of it unless it becomes a magical item.

"Interesting." Kayafe purrs with intrigue. "So we'll need a sample of rituals if we want to make more of their mana..."

We can't just invent or 'discover' a type of ritual mana; it just doesn't work that way. Well, it *is* possible but trying to transform mana into the signature mana of someone, or a ritual mana, is like trying to describe a color you've never seen before. It's only something you can know by seeing it.

"Yes, but I have no idea about the effect it will have on anything made from it, so that's another subject of research we need to do."

We have a lot of work to do in the future, and while I have the spare minds and bodies, Kayafe doesn't. That won't stop me from getting ahead, though. I summon two more clones and send them and the ritual mana sample back home to study the things we discovered today.

"It's morning now, so let's take a bath and then go back into the dungeon."

Yrania stalks her two subjects of study as they return to the dungeon. It's such a rare opportunity to study how one acts after being trapped for so long!

It looks like Kayafe has a subconscious dependency on Alysara, a type of imprinting. But this is likely due to social foreignness and economic dependency, so it is expected that Kayafe will slowly become more independent once she gets used to her situation. Yrania takes mental notes. She doesn't feel her subjects mental condition, even if it would grant her much better certainty for her study, but doing so counteracts her efforts to hide.

Yrania found it best to remain unnoticed when studying people. Her presence often unnerves her subjects, so she uses her Bond to simply be unnoticed. This doesn't work on everyone, like Lavaerd, but it works on most, even those with moderately trained mental resistance, since she is strong enough to pierce some resistance.

Yrania uses [Mental Form] to shrink herself to enter the dungeon, following the duo, and arrives back on the other side. Another great subject of study is to see how the Runalymo are adapting to living in the Dungeon; too bad she wasn't here to see how they behaved when they first set up the village.

So many new subjects to study, not enough time!

Yrania can't help but be jealous of Alysara's cloning ability, but she banished those emotions from her mind to help focus on her targets.

Kayafe has taken a mentor role, but the reason is clear, or more likely, has more than one reason. It is likely she feels that she needs to repay Alysara. It is also likely that she wants to mentor her because they share the same skill, and probably more reasons, but those should be the two biggest reasons.

The royal-blue-haired couple flies back toward the mountains.

"So, monsters over twice your level are not a challenge for you," Kayafe lectures Alysara. "But not everything is susceptible to vitality damage, so you can try to slay them through mana toxicity. This is most useful against weaker monsters, but there are powerful monsters who haven't trained their resistance, so it's always good to cover all the bases before you have to resort to fighting seriously."

Alysara nods attentively and follows Kayafe's instructions to slay several nearby monsters.

The lessons Kayafe is teaching are fairly well known, well, not the exact same lesson, but rather the method is. The key point is to always attack the most common weak point you are capable of exploiting; for Yrania, it is the Mind.

“So first attack vitality and the mana reserves of an enemy; then, if it doesn’t kill them, try mana toxicity.”

“Yes.”

The training went on for several hours, reminding her of her own training by her parents, and this nostalgia is further intensified by the next lesson.

“Now that you have the basics, let’s move onto the next level of training,” Kayafe announces once she’s satisfied with Alysara’s improvement. “Now, do what I show you, and once you get a feel for your level of power, then you’ll practice against more powerful monsters.”

Kayafe grabs hold of all mana in the area, even attempting to grab Yrania’s, but she resists the efforts and, with [Normality], makes her not realize the resistance. Kayafe then gathers the mana in a massive ball above her, compressing the millions of mana into an arrow of solid-beyond-liquid mana, which Yrania didn’t even think was possible, before turning the whole thing to a type of lightning spell mana and launching it at a distant mountain top.

The arrow blitzed through the air in a fraction of a second, and with a blinding flash followed by a delayed and deafening roar, the entire mountain is split apart with crackling energy still in the air. Massive boulders rain back down from the sky as a shockwave approaches, carrying a ring of lightning which safely passes around the Runalymo pair. Yrania is simply unaffected by the damage, even shrugging off a direct hit by a boulder as it shatters upon contact with her back.

The destruction is quite impressive, and she can almost hear her father’s words in a similar lesson.

The difference between an exalted being and a legendary being is the capability of total annihilation. Even the weakest legendary being is capable of city-destroying levels of power, and it only goes up from there. My mother is capable of drowning entire continents if she wishes; that is the power every dragon aspires to have. However, true power is not destruction, but control. Being able to destroy your foes with minimal casualties is what separates the truly powerful from the strong.

Yrania watches the glow of molten rock falling into the deep chasm. She and her grandmother’s recent fight had them holding back quite a lot. If they had fought seriously, the Runalymo would have been devastated. Strikes from dragons have meteoric power behind them, and the shock waves are often strong enough to blow over trees and buildings for dozens kilometers.

Of course, not every Legendary being is capable of *mass* destruction, like those strange eldritch whatever they were. Some specialize in forms of non-collateral attacks, like Yrania. Mind attacks won’t normally affect physical things. Assassins and others who specialized heavily in single-target attacks likewise go against her lesson, but generalists like Kayafe and Alysara will have to learn this lesson eventually.

Alysara is in shock at the display of power, and even Kayafe shows a little surprise.

“... As I said, I too need to get used to my new strength,” Kayafe remarks, recovering quickly.
“And even if you control the same amount of mana, you still won’t be able to match this, but you still need to learn your strength so you don’t accidentally hurt people.”

Alysara nods tentatively before mimicking Kayafe’s spell, aiming at another mountain peak. With another thunderous roar, that too is split in half, but the damage is clearly far less, and the boulders aren’t blown nearly as far away, not even reaching them.

“So, how strong of a monster do you think you are capable of slaying? It’s time for practical training against a more capable foe.”