

Metal and Magic

Chapter 26

Harry took a deep breath and let the cold garage air fill his lungs. It was a good night to be alive. The cavernous garage beneath Tony's Malibu mansion was lit up brightly, and the new Ferrari F430 sat in the center, its red paint reflecting off the polished concrete floor. Harry ran his hand along the fender, caressing the smoothness of it. It had been delivered that morning, right on schedule. It was a replacement for the Ferrari he and Tony had ruined during the last impromptu kidnapping attempt.

"One car for the price of two," Harry said, admiring the badge. He still had the faintest headache from trying to deal with those idiots at the dealership, but the scent of wax, motor oil, and leather seats was the perfect cure. He wondered if Pepper would approve of him pouring another round of vodka, but then he remembered that she and Tony had gone to Europe for a business trip. They wouldn't be back for several days. Harry had the place to himself.

He circled the car, dragging his fingertips over the glass and carbon fiber. The seat still had that rich, leathery new car smell. He popped the door and dropped into the driver's seat. He closed his eyes and listened to the ticking sounds of the cooling engine.

After a minute, he called out, "Hey, Jarvis."

His response was instant and just a bit smug. "Good evening, Harry. I trust the new Ferrari meets with your approval?"

"Only if it can survive another hit squad. If I crash this one, Tony will probably make me drive a Prius as punishment."

"Noted. Would you like me to install additional security measures? Smoke dispensers, bulletproof glass, or perhaps a short-range missile system?"

Harry snorted. "As fun as that sounds, no. I want you to scan all my books for any references to the Knight Bus. Every single mention." Harry had scanned every single textbook, notebook, and piece of parchment that he had taken from Voldemort. It was all stored in Jarvis's servers.

There was a pause, as if Jarvis had to suppress the urge to scoff. "I have found one hundred and forty-three references to the term 'Knight Bus'. Is there something in particular you are looking for?"

"Enchantment details. I want to know how the bus works. I want to know about the runes, the spells, and everything else. The bus used to squeeze between London traffic, and nobody seemed to notice it. I want to copy that shit for my own use."

“Very well,” Jarvis replied. “Please hold while I process the relevant files.”

Harry rested his head back and enjoyed the silence. Outside, the Pacific Ocean crashed against the bluffs, and every so often, a distant helicopter thudded by. He could get used to this.

A minute later, Jarvis pinged him. “I have located an entire manual regarding the construction and maintenance of the Knight Bus. Would you like it in PDF or hard copy?”

Harry grinned. “Send the highlights to the screen ...” Harry said, pointing at the giant flat screen TV on the garage wall. “... and get the engraver ready to handle the rune clusters. Also, pull up any relevant safety notes.”

“Done. I’ve also sent the files to your phone,” he told Harry, and sure enough, a second later, his phone beeped.

“Perfect.” Harry rolled out of the car, grabbing his phone as he went. Sure enough, a PDF and a folder of photos waited in his inbox. He scrolled through the annotated runes, reading the messy handwriting with increasing delight. There were diagrams for shock absorption, multi-phase anti-collision arrays, and a section called “Unstoppable Momentum.”

“Jarvis, you can handle the laser engraver, and I’ll take care of the rune activation and the enchantments.”

“Of course, sir. Should I notify Tony that you are beginning experimental modifications?”

“No. I’d rather surprise the git,” Harry said. “Just keep this between us.”

“Acknowledged,” Jarvis replied, his voice neutral but with an undertone of amusement.

As Jarvis began telling him the optimal places for each rune cluster, Harry grabbed a notebook and began taking notes. He grinned, feeling a surge of excitement. “Run a diagnostic on the car,” he told Jarvis. “And begin disassembling it.”

Jarvis responded instantly. “All systems nominal. I am detecting a slight misalignment localized to the suspension mount. Would you like me to analyze further?”

“Log it for now,” Harry said. “We’re just getting started.”

He crouched beside the car and looked over the PDF. It was a meditative process. He kept the garage music on low. Tony’s playlist was heavy on Queen and AC/DC, but Harry didn’t mind. He liked the steady beat as he worked. He lost track of time as he flipped through them, making notes.

He called up to Jarvis. "Scan the anti-collision arrays and build me a virtual model. I want to see how the runes will affect the car's frame."

"Modeling complete," Jarvis replied after a moment. "Preliminary analysis suggests that, if successful, the car will be able to warp the space while moving at speed."

Harry pumped his fist. "Just like the Knight Bus."

"There is a significant risk of phasing the occupants into a solid object as well," Jarvis added. "The manual suggests that the original Knight Bus had three fatalities before they perfected the spell."

Harry smirked. "That's what safety notes are for. I'll start with a test run on Tony's lawnmower."

"Should I prepare emergency services in advance?" Jarvis asked.

"Only if you can't fix what I've broken," Harry shot back.

He spent the next hour prepping the garage for his experiment. He rolled the Ferrari onto a hydraulic lift and removed the wheels. Jarvis controlled the team of rolling mechanical arms to start disassembling the car with Harry's help. Harry would load parts onto the laser engraver, and Jarvis would upload the necessary files to engrave the rune sets. Harry noticed that the mechanical arms could load and unload the parts faster, so Harry just stood aside and let them do their work. Every once in a while, there was a bolt or screw that could only be reached by a human hand, and Harry would step in. Jarvis would offer a helpful suggestion when needed. Harry appreciated the company.

When he didn't have much to do, Harry went to work on the tires. He enchanted all four to be heat and fire-resistant, and he made them much more durable. He didn't want them exploding when he inevitably jumped a curb.

By two in the morning, they had most of the car stripped down. He stepped back, wiped the sweat from his brow, and admired his handiwork. There were several huge piles of parts. The largest pile was stacked by the engraver. The arms would continue loading them onto the engraver, where Jarvis would add the required runes.

"Jarvis," he said. "Make sure to engrave the panels and frame with strengthening runes. Also, add anti-vibration and fire suppressant runes if they won't mess with the overall array. I'll test it tomorrow."

"Understood. Good night, Harry."

"Good night, Jarvis ... and thanks for the help," Harry replied and headed upstairs while Jarvis and the arms continued to work through the night. He couldn't wait to test the car when it was finished.

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The next morning, Harry was back in the garage by sunrise, fueled by coffee and excitement. He wore Tony's spare overalls, which were too short, too tight, and bore the faded Stark Industries logo. The F430 sat on the lift, stripped to the frame. The wheels, seats, and most of the panels lay scattered across the workspace. The engine lay in hundreds of pieces. It looked less like a garage and more like a chop shop.

Harry sighed. There was so much that needed to be done. All he could do was carry on, knowing the end result would be well worth it. Harry started with the engine. Each part had been laser-engraved with various runic patterns. All Harry needed to do was activate each one. On Jarvis's orders, he activated the one he needed to. Some would only be activated once the entire engine had been reassembled. He trusted Jarvis to know what he was talking about, because Harry surely didn't. It took hours to get the engine back together.

"The next step is to power up the runic core," Harry said.

"Caution, Harry," Jarvis replied. "This will void your warranty."

"I'm surprised they even gave me one after what happened."

"Technically, they did not. I leveraged Mr. Stark's reputation to secure the dealer's best promotional coverage. The manager sounded less than pleased."

Harry snickered and shook his head. "It sucks to be him. Let's get this thing humming."

He levitated the engine block onto the bench, read the instructions that Jarvis had provided, and started enchanting. There was a subtle resistance in the air as the magic took hold. A shimmer passed over the metal, and the runes pulsed faintly. Harry muttered a quick binding spell and felt the car's essence bend and lock into place.

"Not bad," Harry said. He ran his hands over the engine and felt the enchantments vibrating with power. Meanwhile, Jarvis was testing the new laser engraver Harry had ordered. It had been delivered while he was still sleeping. The engraver was set into the end of a mechanical arm, and it could be rolled into place using a remote. Jarvis had overridden the signal, and he was now controlling it directly. The arm wasn't nearly as big as the ones used to take the car apart, but it didn't need to be.

Jarvis brought the new laser over to the next component, which was a set of custom shock absorbers Tony had ordered for his Ferrari. Harry, of course, had no problem helping himself to them. "I am calibrating the alignment based on the original specs," Jarvis announced. "The car will continue to sit low."

Harry thought it over. "That's fine. The anti-collision runes should take care of any unnecessary bumps."

"Understood. I have also identified several weaknesses in the frame that may interfere with the enchantment. Shall I flag them for later?"

"Yeah, do it."

The engraver went to work, etching runes into the steel. The smell of burned metal quickly filled the garage. A second later, Jarvis activated the hood fans to suck up all the nasty smoke and fumes. Harry liked the way it all came together. It was a strange blend of wizardry and mechanical genius. He wondered if Tony would ever understand the thrill of mixing magic and science. Probably not, but Harry didn't really care.

Jarvis finished the shocks and moved on to the drive shaft. "We will need a secondary button panel to activate the enchantments you desire, Harry," Jarvis said. "I have scoured the internet and found a suitable replacement. I have already ordered it and paid the premium for overnight shipping. It is scheduled to arrive later today."

Harry stopped what he was doing and turned to the ceiling, looking directly at Jarvis's camera. "Did you charge it to Tony's account?"

"Of course, sir."

Harry grinned. "Excellent."

He went back to work, humming to himself. The day passed in a blur. At one point, he accidentally zapped himself with a miscast spell, and the screwdriver in his hand fused to a wrench. It took him ten minutes to separate the tools. Jarvis was no help at all, except to suggest that he try hitting them together at a specific angle.

By noon, Harry had most of the runes installed. The engine, suspension, and chassis were all marked and enchanted. He reassembled the car with Jarvis's and the arms' help. Jarvis coordinated the pneumatic tools, torque settings, and the sequencing of bolts, making the whole process weirdly satisfying.

As they finished up, Jarvis said, "The button panel will arrive before six p.m. Would you like to schedule a test drive for tonight?"

"Absolutely," Harry said.

"In that case, I shall run the necessary diagnostics and make sure the car is in perfect working order."

He stepped back to admire the F430. It looked almost normal, but if you looked closely, you would see that the seams and panels were lined with faintly shimmering runes. Harry pressed the ignition. The engine caught with a throaty growl, then settled into a low, menacing idle.

“Systems check,” Jarvis said. “All readings are green. The runic arrays are harmonized and ready for activation.”

Harry couldn’t stop grinning. “Load the Knight Bus protocols.” Jarvis had had to write custom firmware for the Ferrari’s computer system to keep it from going haywire.

“Protocol loaded,” Jarvis said. “Awaiting input.”

Harry placed his hand on the wheel. “This is going to be fun.”

He turned off the ignition and went upstairs to shower and eat. He had skipped lunch, and his stomach was already growling.

When he came back down, there was a box waiting for him. Inside was the secondary button panel. It was sleek, aluminum, and loaded with switches. Jarvis had even printed labels for each one. There was PHASE, INVISIBLE, FLIGHT, and EMERGENCY.

He installed the panel in the dash, wiring it in with only a small amount of swearing. The car was ready. He stared at the panel for a minute, then pressed the “PHASE” button. Nothing happened, but he had a feeling it would work.

“Jarvis,” he said, “Are you ready to go for a spin?” Harry had installed a dashcam with a connected satellite modem and antenna so Jarvis could stay connected to the car.

“Indeed, I am, Harry.”

He couldn’t wait to see what kind of trouble he’d get into.

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Two days later, the sun shone brightly, and the Pacific wind blew in strong enough to knock over Harry’s bucket of soapy water three times. He didn’t care. He was too busy buffing the Ferrari’s hood, turning slow circles with a chamois, and admiring the way the red paint glowed in the sunlight. Harry’s jeans were splotted with water droplets, and he didn’t even notice the cold. He was grinning like a lunatic.

He finished with the hood and moved on to the windshield, spraying it with a citrus cleaner and then wiping it down with another clean rag. The car was perfect. He’d washed it all by hand. He even used Tony’s toothbrush to get the brake dust out of the wheel spokes.

Harry heard the crunch of gravel behind him. He turned to see a black Mercedes creeping up the driveway. The Mercedes rolled to a stop, and Tony got out of the back, still wearing a sharp blazer and sunglasses. His hair was a disaster. He had a bag slung over one shoulder and the look of a man who hadn't slept since he left.

The driver popped the trunk and pulled out three bags, all of them Louis Vuitton and all of them full to bursting. Tony ignored the luggage and walked straight up to Harry.

"Look at you," Tony said, squinting at the car. "You've gone full dad-mode. Pretty soon, you'll be yelling at kids to get off your lawn."

Harry buffed a final streak from the roof and straightened up. "Welcome home. How was Europe?"

"Boring. Pepper dragged me to seventeen meetings, and I had to eat escargot at two in the morning. The French are insane. Also, the girls in Paris? Wild. They do stuff the British girls only dream about."

Harry grinned. "Did you learn anything?"

"Yeah. Don't say 'anything goes' while you're bent over." Tony circled the car, running his hand along the roof. He stopped at the rear, crouched down to inspect the exhaust, and then flicked the spoiler with his finger. "She's a beauty. I'm glad to see you took my advice, and you're finally living above your means."

Harry leaned on the roof, arms crossed. "You want to go for a ride and test her out?"

"Does a French girl stick her finger in places where it definitely doesn't belong?" Tony smirked and dropped his bag. He walked around to the passenger side.

Harry opened the driver's door and dropped into the seat. He ran his hands over the wheel, then poked at the button panel. Tony whistled when he saw the new switches. "You've been busy, haven't you?"

Harry shrugged. "I had to fill the time somehow."

Tony grinned, and Harry started the engine. It roared to life before settling into a rumbling purr. "Hurry up! Let's take her for a spin," Tony said. Harry smirked, checked the mirrors, and backed the Ferrari out onto the road.

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The first few minutes of the drive were pretty standard. Harry showed off, gunning the engine and taking corners at terrifying speeds. Tony watched him with a lazy grin, happy to be home.

They tore down the Pacific Coast Highway, weaving between SUVs and delivery vans. Harry handled the car like he'd been born with a steering wheel in his hand.

They hit the city limits, and the traffic thickened. The Ferrari snarled through the gears, jumping from lane to lane. Harry enjoyed the sense of danger, but he was waiting for the moment when he could really show off.

"Watch this," Harry said, stomping the gas.

The car surged forward, pinning both of them to the seats. The speedometer soared. Up ahead, the road narrowed, and the sea of brake lights grew dense. Cars were bumper-to-bumper as far as the eye could see.

"You may want to slow down," Tony said, glancing at Harry.

Harry smirked. "Why would I do that?"

The Ferrari barreled toward the traffic at ninety miles per hour. Tony's eyes went wide. "Jesus, Harry, there's nowhere to go!"

Harry didn't even flinch. "It's fine. Just hold on."

Tony raised both hands in surrender, then grabbed the dash as the wall of traffic approached. At the last possible second, Harry mashed a button on the secondary panel. The runes in the dash glowed blue. "Tony squealed like a frightened girl.

The world blurred. The traffic didn't part so much as stretch, the cars on either side of them compressing into cartoonishly narrow shapes. The Ferrari slipped between two delivery trucks with just millimeters to spare ... only the "spare" didn't really exist. It was as if the universe briefly squished the car, and then let it spring back to normal on the other side.

Tony let out a cry of relief. "Holy shit!"

Harry chuckled, and the car zipped between a concrete divider and a school bus, squeezing in a gap so tight it should have peeled off both mirrors. The bus driver never even looked up.

Tony watched in complete wonder. "This is insane. Do you realize what you've made here?"

Harry grinned, his hands loose on the wheel. "It gets better. Try the 'INVISIBLE' button."

Tony pressed the switch. The world outside seemed to lose a bit of its saturation, and the Ferrari's own reflection vanished from every nearby window. The only thing visible was the faint outline of the windshield and the ghostly shimmer of the runes. Every other driver on the road carried on, oblivious.

“They can’t see us?” Tony asked, incredulous.

“Nope,” Harry said. “To them, we’re just air.”

Tony giggled like a schoolboy. “I want three. No, four.”

Harry laughed and shook his head. “You’re like an annoying brat on Christmas day.”

Tony grinned. “What does ‘EMERGENCY’ do?” Without waiting for an answer, Tony jammed on the button. He flinched hard when a sonic boom cracked through the air. Out of the rear view mirror, Tony saw flames shooting out of the back of the car. The car suddenly began picking up an insane amount of speed. Within seconds, Tony’s head was being jammed into the headrest, and when he saw his reflection in the mirror, he yelped. His skin was being pulled back by the force of the acceleration. His lips were stretched aside, exposing his gums, and his eyelids were pulled down so far that he could see the pink underneath his eyeballs. Thankfully, Harry turned off the switch and laughed.

“That’s for a quick getaway,” Harry explained the obvious.

“No shit,” Tony answered, breathing heavily.

Harry pressed the final button. There was a deep, vibrating hum, and the car began to rise off the ground. Tony blinked, then looked down at the ground through his window. It was quickly pulling away from them.

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Tony said, but he was delighted.

Harry had obviously taken inspiration from Arthur Weasley’s old Ford Anglia. He hit the gas, and the car floated above the road, skipping over the lanes while rising as gently as a feather in the breeze. Tony rolled down the window and stuck his hand out, feeling for invisible wires or something. He looked at Harry and started to laugh hysterically.

“You absolute madman,” Tony said. “If the DMV ever figures out what you did to this car, they’ll lock us up for life.”

“I don’t plan on informing them,” Harry chuckled. He spun the wheel, and the Ferrari floated up and over a cluster of semi-trucks.

For the next half hour, they zipped around Los Angeles in a car that bent the laws of physics. Harry flew between skyscrapers and even hovered right above a moving police car. The best part was that no one noticed. The city carried on, completely oblivious to what was going on above them.

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They landed the Ferrari in front of the mansion just as the sun started to dip. Harry felt a weird sense of pride as he killed the ignition.

Tony got out first, slammed the door, and spun around with arms wide. "That was incredible! I need a whole fleet of these. We'll start a dealership. Stark and Potter's Flying Sports Cars." He kept laughing as he paced the driveway. He looked at the car, and then back at Harry. "You're a genius. I mean it."

Harry got out, rolled his shoulders, and stretched his sore legs. The Ferrari's interior wasn't exactly spacious. He was already making plans to fix that oversight. "It took Jarvis and me three days to get those runes right. I don't think I have the energy to make a whole fleet of these things."

Tony waved him off. "I'll settle for one. Also, I'm buying a McLaren. You'll have it by Monday."

Harry groaned. "Why do you even need a McLaren if we already have this?"

Tony grinned. "It's not about need, it's about want. You get that, right?"

Harry shook his head but smiled anyway. He followed Tony inside, and they crashed in the living room, beers in hand and feet up on the coffee table.

"Do you think we'll be spotted if we fly over Area 51?" Tony suddenly asked.

Harry rolled his eyes but smiled regardless. "We can try, but you're driving. Just so you know, I'm apparating away and leaving you behind the moment the missiles start flying."

Tony laughed. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

As the sun set, the two of them sat there, plotting the next big thing. The world had no idea what was coming.