

Forging

Ryun walked through the abandoned city. There were more of them North of the Empire's Wall, some sacked and now only ruins, others so demolished that they could only be called a pile of rocks. And then there were others, like this one, a city that had been abandoned with no signs of battle. People probably ran before the monsters even came close. And after the pursuing monsters came... well, they had no use for an empty city.

It was left whole, mostly, slightly ransacked, but nothing like the destruction he had seen before. He walked through the buildings, looking around. In their hurry people left things behind. Nothing truly valuable, but he had gathered trinkets and items of low value. Most of which he fed to *Bright Star*. Zenker's storage was... a cave filled with wonders. So many items, so many treasures of all kinds. It was a wealth accumulated over a thousand years, by someone who was obviously a bit of a hoarder. There was a pile of broken weapons and armor in the corner of the storage, which Ryun had fed to his forge immediately. He was still going through the rest to figure out what he was going to give to the *Bright Star*. Though, he wouldn't give him much, he had other plans for the items.

He made his way through the town, already knowing where he was going. His resonance sense told him exactly where he could find what he was looking for. The forges were in the eastern part of the city, what probably used to be some kind of industrial area. He made his way through the buildings, heading straight for the largest one. It was... a formidable forge. Larger and better than anything that he had built in the Twilight Melody Sect. But it was also... less in a way.

Sect forges utilized formations, tools that conventional Blacksmithing didn't use. This... this reminded him of forges on Earth. He sensed no formations, but that wasn't surprising, these people were Classers. But there were no arrays either. He wondered how they could craft anything better than a common or uncommon items here. Perhaps they relied on their perks much more. A Cultivator who was on a Path of Blacksmithing didn't have that. A Cultivating smith had a body that was improved, made to survive in

the forge, made to harness and impart all of his craft into his work. They relied on skills and on formations to achieve greater effects.

Ryun had studied Blacksmithing, and his awakened partner had taught him more. But he had no tools other than his own body and knowledge. Nothing to push his craft beyond.

“We are not here for complicated work,” Bright Star said. “At least not in that way.”

Their bond was now on the sixth stage, and it allowed him to store up to relic rarity items, with slight increases to other bonuses.

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| Forged in Stars (Bond Perk) | Any item worn by the user gains +40% to their durability. |
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| Star Forge-Bright Star | |
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| Armory of the Stars | <p>Grants the user the ability to store up to 9 items into the Star Forge up to Relic rarity. Each item placed in the forge will be replicated and stored alongside the original, with the maximum of 12 copies. The rate of replication is:</p> <p>Common rarity - 1 per 30 minutes. Uncommon rarity - 1 per 2 hours. Rare rarity - 1 per 8 hours. Epic rarity - 1 per 24 hours. Legendary - 1 per 48 hours. Mythic - 1 per 72 hours. Relic - 1 per 96 hours.</p> <p>Any item stored in the forge is granted <i>equip</i> and <i>repair</i> while used by the user. The item</p> |

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| | copies will last for 15 minutes outside of the forge if they are not used by the user. |
| Star Improvement | Any item placed in the forge for longer than 7 days will gain bonuses based on rarity: Common rarity - +5 to all stats and +10% to its durability. Uncommon rarity - +10 to all stats and 12% to its durability. Rare rarity - +20 to all stats and +14% to its durability. Epic rarity - + 30 to all stats and +18% to its durability. Legendary rarity - + 40 to all stats and +20% to its durability. Mythic rarity - + 50 to all stats and +22% to its durability. Relic rarity - + 100 to all stats and +24% to its durability |
| Anvil of Stars | Allows you to pull out the anvil of stars from the Star Forge scape. Items made on the Anvil of the Stars gain +10% to their durability and +30 to one stat based on the materials they are made out of. |

He had already changed his replication layout by putting a few of Zenker's Relic items in. The only item that he was actually wearing on his person was an Eternal Ring that hid his screens completely from any power below tier 9. The wording made it seem like there were some powers that could see through it, but he doubted that many had anything like that.

Slowly, Ryun set out to work on igniting the forge and preparing for his work.

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He brought down the black hammer on the anvil of the stars. Each strike against the metal made both the hammer and the anvil light up with stars. The metal was something that he scavenged from the forge itself. Iron of a higher tier, but nothing special. It was easy to manipulate, and it didn't require a lot to work. Ryun let his mind empty as he focused only on the hammer and the metal. He might not have the skills or perks designed for Blacksmithing, but he did have some things that were even more useful. With his techniques he could increase his strength, could increase the push of gravity on him for greater effect. With his body, he didn't have to worry about the heat or getting injured, his eyes allowed him to see Essence. And so he could see the traces of foreign Essence in the iron, with precise applications of his other techniques or aura he could simply eat them away with the Void. His skill allowed him to detect the faintest weaknesses in the iron.

The forging temperature was just right, his hammering form perfect. He held the piece of iron with a tongs that he found laying around, but he could tell that they weren't going to survive this session. Fortunately, this wasn't going to take much longer. He drew the metal out, forming its shape. Then, while it was still molten, he leaned down and shaped a claw of Void Qi on his finger. With it, he sheared off the edges of the blade, carved in lines to the blade's spine. Then, before it started to cool he drew Essence from his core. When one cycled the Essence out, it naturally changed into a crystal form, something about interacting with his core and Qi made it so. Now, he focused on shaping that crystal. The Void Essence left through his finger, filling in the gaps in the blade. He focused on shaping it, but it was... hard. He couldn't shape that Essence as freely as he could his Qi, he had the same issue that he had with unbound Essence around him. Still, it was slightly easier.

When he was finished, he had a blade that was metal filled in with crystallized Void Essence. Quickly he raised the blade and plunged it into the bucket next to him, quenching it in an oil mixture. Steam and fire erupted, and then... the bucket burst apart showering the entire forge in oil.

Ryun grimaced as he scorched himself, but quickly regenerated the injuries. Then, he looked at what remained in his hand. The Void Crystals

had fractured and consumed pieces of the blade, which then ruptured into pieces.

“Hm,” Bright Star said.

“Any ideas as to why that happened?” Ryun asked. He was hoping that they could make this work. Hoped that it might make him understand Essence better.

“Well, I don’t think that Void plays that well with this material, iron is simple and weak. The Essence we used was tier 9. That could be the cause. Or it could be something in the oil, I don’t know, this isn’t our forge, I don’t know what purpose the smith had for all of his tools.”

Ryun grimaced and nodded. They would need to do some more experimenting. He did need to get back to his sect, but... he felt that this time was important for him. Selia had told him some of what he should expect in the Sect, and... he knew that once he got back there would be far less time for him to spend just working on his craft and Cultivation.

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After relocating to a new forge, he tried the same thing with his Qi, trying to crystallize and somehow bond it with the metal itself. It never lasted for long even after he managed to get it to survive for a bit, and he had spent a couple of days on it. His Qi just... it broke apart after a while, when he no longer focused on it. Even though the Void was easier for him to manipulate because of his Peak Evolved perk. *Bright Star* was certain that there was a way to keep that from happening, he just didn’t know yet. His knowledge had increased with their bond, but there was still a lot that he didn’t remember.

His next attempt was again with Essence. This time he took Essence from the forge itself. Fire Essence entered his body and he moved it through his conduits. He had found that he couldn’t really change the state of Essence that he drew in, not unless he drew into his core first. Somehow that allowed him to crystallize it. He didn’t want to pollute his core, so he took in just the amount necessary. He pulled it out of his core and focused on shaping the crystal along the paths that he created in the blade.

He quenched it after he was done, waiting for it to explode. But then it didn't. He pulled the blade out and saw orange crystal along the edges and inside the blade, like it was filled with it. He used his Void Claw to shear off the roughness, and to create a sharper edge, make it resemble a real metal blade. After he was done with that and the blade cooled, he moved to the small workstation in the corner of the room where he assembled the hilt and the guard.

What he got was a short sword with crystal edge. The Framework asked him for a name, but he left it as it was and looked at what he had crafted.

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| Lesser Short Sword of Forge's Fire | +4 to intelligence. +4 to strength. +30 to strength. This blade deals a small amount of fire damage with each wound inflicted. |
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A simple weapon, but somehow still Epic rarity—probably because it had such an effect, or because it was made with forged Essence. The 30 stats came from his **Star Improvement** ability which also told him that the strength came from iron. Intelligence though... that could only be from the Essence. And the name had a hint too. It was called Forge's Fire, indicating that perhaps the source of Essence used in making the weapon mattered too. Intent and purpose, were important for a lot of things it seemed.

He leaned the weapon against his forearm and cut. It didn't pierce his skin. He grimaced, his endurance was too high for him to be cut by such a weak weapon it seemed. The edge was made out of fire from the forge, which he estimated to be around tier four. His body was made out of tier nine Void, it did make sense that it couldn't injure him. Still, he tried again, this time he stabbed it. After applying slowly increasing pressure, the blade broke in his arm. The crystal shattered first, and the iron bent and broke apart. Both had been made up out of low tiered Essences, but the crystal shattered first. Of course, this was his first successful attempt at crafting a weapon like this.

He would need to practice a lot more than this.

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The silence was deafening. Not just the lack of sound, but the lack of life. No monsters had moved in behind the dome monsters, no people. There was nothing. He sat on the highest tower in the empty city and just took it in. He had never truly been this alone, always he had other life around him, even on Earth. Ryun didn't mind being alone, by himself, but... This experience had made him realize something. He no longer enjoyed it. He couldn't help but wish that Anrosh, or Selia or Erdania were with him. Someone, anyone.

The bond he had with Selia reminded him always that he wasn't alone, not really. She was always just a thought away. He prepared to reach out to her for their evening talks, and then paused.

Something... a sensation intruded on his thoughts. A familiar one. He stood up and tilted his head, turning on instinct to look Northwest. Something in the distance was... He hadn't felt this in a while, not since Ullia Dar Ishi. It was the call of True Death that was about to happen, not just any death, but one that was accepted even welcomed. Someone was about to die.

Ryun sprang into motion running across the sky, heading straight for it.