

# CHAPTER 167 – CRYSTAL ORE

Once Sam was assured that the mandy was okay, he turned to the crystalline creature's haul and picked up one of the pieces of ore.

**[Crystalline Zinc Ore]**

**(Tier 1 Material) (F-Class)**

**(☆☆ Uncommon)**

**A chunk of stone containing trace amounts of mana crystal and the metal zinc. Impure and unrefined, a Smith can smelt this into ingots, nuggets, and similar crafted goods.**

Sam's eyes lit up as he examined piece after piece. All of them were the same type of ore.

He'd never heard of crystal zinc before, but it was clearly a thing here and it was Uncommon rarity at that, putting it on a higher level altogether.

Naturally, that'd mean it would be more difficult for Sam to work with, and that meant more Experience.

He looked at the crystal imp. "Can you find more of this?"

Sam didn't dare hope, but as the imp nodded enthusiastically and took off, Sam couldn't contain his grin any longer.

He wasn't sure if the zinc was literally a crystal variant, or if the lump of ore contained both metal and crystal of disparate parts. It was even possible that through Sam's Smithing process, he might end up with the latter, and at higher skill, he could uncover the true crystal zinc.

In the end, it was just a theory for now.

Whatever it ended up as, it was something Sam could work with. Even if he blew up half of the attempts, he could tell that working with this material was going to be well worth the effort.

What might mana-infused metal be able to do?

He was sure as hell going to find out.

But his Blacksmith abilities came first.

With the help of Kai and a few of the mandys, Sam hauled the remainder of the crystalline ore onto his impromptu workbench and went over his Blacksmith abilities.

[Mining]

(Blacksmith Skill) (F-Class)

(★ Common)

*A Carpenter would not pick wood at random, a butcher would not take just any animal. Why should a Blacksmith take what materials they are given? In order to find the highest purity nodes and ores therein, a Blacksmith must be willing to brave the wilds and delve the depths in search of the perfect ore. [Mining] provides the intrepid Blacksmith with the ability to sense ore veins, and the skill to extract ores equal to or below this skill's rarity level. Grants a minuscule bonus to the effect of Strength, Dexterity, and Insight when using [Mining].*

[Alloying]

(Blacksmith Skill) (F-Class)

(★ Common)

*Certain metals are too soft, too malleable, too brittle, or too rough to work well on their own, but they impart useful enhancements and imbue all the same. Any decent Blacksmith knows how to*

*fold disparate metals together to create alloyed metals. Alloying allows a new Blacksmith to combine multiple types of metal together in order to create a superior material.*

*This practice bridges the gap between certain crafting recipe difficulties by opening up a greater selection of materials to work with, while potentially tapping into a wider avenue of enhancements and imbuelements in crafted weapons, armor, and equipment. Grants a miniscule bonus to the effect of Strength, Vigor, and Awareness when using [Alloying].*

[Stonecraft]

(Blacksmith Skill) (F-Class)

(★ Common)

*What is stone but brittle metal? Unlock the secrets of the abundant mineral that most Blacksmiths so callously cast aside as so much dross. Stonecraft grants the ability to identify, craft, and use stone in a wide variety of applications. Grants a minuscule bonus to the effect of Strength, Dexterity, and Vigor when using [Stonecraft].*

[Tempering]

(Blacksmith Skill) (F-Class)

(★ Common)

*Utilizing a forge and the Blacksmith's own mana, any metal can be further improved by [Tempering]. Depending upon the degree of [Tempering] performed, the properties of nearly any metal or metallic object can be altered to the Blacksmith's desires. Grants a minuscule bonus to the effect of Strength and Vigor when using [Tempering].*

Sam looked at all the skills and despaired. *Fuck, they're all great.*

There wasn't a bad one in the bunch. Each of them seemed useful, almost *necessarily* so for his future career that he couldn't imagine just picking one.

What was worse was that any new abilities later on would also likely be incredibly good and, therefore, he'd *always* be in a quandary.

Sam did not do well with indecision.

[Mining] was of immediate use. There was absolutely no doubt about that. He hadn't found a seam of ore yet, but at the same time... he currently was so low level that he could still functionally level up from simple [Demon Coins].

It took a lot more [Bronze Ingots] in order to level up than it once had, but it was still a viable path to leveling and he had plenty of coins left over.

His friends were able to find more [Ore Boulders] and smash them, bringing him the materials they found. For the time being, he would actually lose out on leveling speed if he took time to go search for ore veins with [Mining].

No doubt it would be useful later, immensely so, but for now it wouldn't help him level up, and that was what he needed to focus on.

Now [Alloying] brought up some rather uncomfortable questions. So far, he'd been making [Bronze Ingots] by using [Smelt] to melt down the bronze [Demon Coins] and reform them into their base metal.

Bronze was an alloy of tin and copper. He wasn't *creating* bronze, merely changing its shape. And the existence of [Alloying] strongly suggested that the copper and tin ores that he found would be useless to him without the skill.

He could probably make [Tin Ingots] and [Copper Ingots] separately, but not [Bronze Ingots] by combining the both of them.

Without [Alloying] he probably couldn't even create steel eventually, or any other type of metal that was a combination of multiple parts.

The [Crystalline Zinc Ore] was *already* practically an alloy, and he strongly suspected that he wouldn't be able to do anything with them without [Alloying].

With all the materials he had at his disposal, only being able to use the ores in their most basic form would be quite hampering to his progression.

Not only were alloyed metals more appropriate—bronze being far superior for tools than copper or tin—they would no doubt be harder to work with.

Besides, if he gained a bonus to Experience for every new recipe that he hadn't created before, [Alloying] would increase the number of recipes he had at his disposal immediately.

With just the materials he had right now, he could create both bronze and brass. Maybe there were other unique metal alloys that were known only to Islegardians as well.

Sam put [Alloying] as a strong contender for his first chosen ability.

Whereas [Stonecraft] shored up what his group was missing. Nobody could directly work with stone, and yet this ability offered just that.

As he thought about it more, he realized it was more of a side upgrade. Something that branched out in a different direction, and therefore augmented Blacksmith as a result.

No doubt it would be useful, especially for building things that they needed. Sam wanted to make some sort of uber forge for the

Archflame to call its new home. One that he could connect with piping and firebricks to fuel various furnaces and forges across the Skyshard, eventually.

With [Stonecraft], he could do that. And it would have the added benefit of improving his ability to level up, similar to [Alloying].

The downside was it might take him further from his path as a Blacksmith. Knowing what he did now about how the Shard chose abilities and future Second and Third Order variants, he wasn't sure it would be a good idea.

Especially not as his first pick. From what he learned from Volquist and their discussion, the first ability you chose was of paramount importance. It set the tone for all future skills and the path you took with your Job, Profession, or Path.

Though in this case, Sam highly doubted he could change his Path. That seemed locked in, no matter what he did. And it had remained Void Path well after level 10, when he should have received a Second Order Path.

If his decisions, even down to what skills and abilities he picked up for Blacksmith, could change what his Profession morphed into down the line, then what would that do if he actually selected [Stonecraft] rather than something else purely dedicated to metal and the like?

It might make his Blacksmithing Profession more versatile for sure, but it might also render his crafting ability less specialized towards metal entirely. Maybe he was putting too much thought into what was probably an educated guess, but he tried to heed Volquist's advice well.

That narrowed his choices down to [Alloying] and [Tempering]. If he had to admit it, [Tempering] was more appealing by far. He wanted to be able to improve the rarity and enhancements of anything he created.

Maybe he was reading into the Shardscript of [Tempering] a little too much, but if he could alter the properties of a metal, couldn't he then change up the enhancements an ingot might produce down the line?

No matter what, he was going to have to pick up [Tempering] at some point. He simply couldn't live without it. The question was, would it be [Alloying] first or would it be [Tempering]?

[Tempering] might allow him to double-dip as it were, by creating an item then immediately [Tempering] it. But if he picked up [Tempering] *after* [Alloying], he could do the same to far more materials and items.

One of the dullahans knelt nearby, seeming to examine the [Crystalline Zinc Ore]. Even without the living armor being within his periphery, somehow Sam could still sense its presence.

Similarly, he knew it was that strangely determined one that was the last one standing. Now that he thought about it, he realized that particular dullahan had been watching Sam for a while.

He'd never seen any one of them taking an interest in something that it wasn't commanded to, so that was curious in and of itself.

Technically, it was in a better state to defend the settlement than the unconscious ones, but Sam didn't have the heart to tell it to effectively go away, even if it was for the best.

"What do you think I should pick, buddy?" Sam asked.

It shifted, turning slightly towards Sam. It made an open gesture with its hand, seeming to ask him to elaborate. For a moment, he marveled at the degree of articulation the magical being possessed.

Robots and machines were never on this level back on old Earth.

"I've got Blacksmithing abilities to pick. I've narrowed it down to [Alloying] and [Tempering]," Sam answered, hoping his guess was

right. “I like what [Tempering] can do, but [Alloying] seems to be one of the more integral abilities a Blacksmith can do for sure.”

The dullahan motioned at the [Crystal Zinc Ore].

“Sure, go ahead,” Sam said.

It gingerly picked up the ore as if it was afraid it would break the material, and then put it next to another one.

Sam groaned. He knew what that meant.

The dullahan thought he should pick [Alloying], considering it put the zinc next to the copper.

And that, more than anything, sealed the deal for Sam.

He picked up [Alloying] and looked over the dullahan. An idea came to him. “Do you want to help me out with some Blacksmithing?”

Sam asked the headless suit of armor.

Sure, it only had one arm, but the dullahans were impressively strong. Only recently was Sam able to overpower them in a direct contest. Even with one arm, this single dullahan could be a great help to him.

*Though I’m not sure if that’ll count as using a tool or cheating,* Sam thought to himself. To the dullahan, however, he said, “I can’t be sure I’ll be able to teach you Blacksmithing, but if you’d like to be my assistant, I’ll impart what I can.”

The dullahan abruptly shot up to its feet and gave an exuberant fist pump of celebration and—here Sam had to guess—acceptance of Sam’s offer.