

## Forged

Bright Star came down with a thunderous growl, that went unheard. Ryun's power manifested around him—**Oblivion's Mirror**—imprinted the concept behind his power into the fabric of reality itself. It... diminished other Essence, allowing his Aura to devour the air around them, devour gravity, with far greater ease, leaving nothing to obstruct his hammer's passage.

He hit the blade on the anvil with enough force to splinter mountains. Only Erdania's power pulsing in the anvil, the might of Worldstone, kept it from shattering. The fire blazed all around them, the distilled source whirling as it was guided by their will and pushed into the blade. He did not have the same connection with Erdania that he had with Selia, and for that their process was slower. And yet, he could bring to bear a lot more force with her than he had been able to do with Selia. Erdania could endure it, where Selia was more about precision and control.

Only the flashes of light announced his strikes, and the blasts of unimaginable heat. He knew that it was hurting Erdania, it was hurting him too. Every strike burned a layer of his skin, and with every rise of his hammer he regenerated it. She didn't regenerate as he did, but she could take a lot of punishment.

Regardless, they were close to the end. The hammer came down again, and the heat around them surged then fully passed into the blade. It was done. Ryun used his aura and power manifest to consume any residual heat in the forge and then allowed air back in. Erdania took a deep breath, and Ryun moved aside with the blade, quenching it in a formation laden bath. It did most of the work for him, it sealed the heat inside and then reduced the blade to room temperature, making it easier to handle.

Ryun moved to the worktable and assembled the handle, the guard, and the pommel. Erdania moved to stand next to him while he worked, watching over their creation. They had moved to their private forge in

what had once been Ven'oran, the city that Ryun had turned into something of his little hideout. He shouldn't have done what he had in the city. He knew that his Aspect could be difficult for lower tiered people to handle. He had just been too angry and needed an immediate outlet.

Once he was done, he raised the weapon and looked at it. It was a straight blade, a jian, the metal it was made out of had a faint green hue to it. He offered it to her, and she took it in her hand.

She turned it as she studied it, and as she twisted it the light caught on it just right and he could see green flames burning, trapped in the metal. He had added a tiny piece of his Aspect, the desire to consume everything, to the flames. And She had added the piece of her Aspect, Worldstone, to make it enduring. Even without reading the weapon's description he knew what it would be able to do. It could create flames that consumed all and refused to be put out.

"Masterwork," she said. "It is a great weapon."

Ryun looked at it sadly. "It isn't what we were trying to make."

He knew that he shouldn't have been disappointed, but he couldn't help but be.

"Well," Erdania started. "I'm not Selia."

"No," Ryun said, before he could stop himself. Erdania put the blade on the table and turned. Ryun reached out and caught her arm. "Don't. I'm sorry Dani, I didn't mean that. You are right, it is a great weapon. More than I could've accomplished alone. The fact that you've indulged me for all these years and learned how to smith, means the world to me. I just..."

"I know," Erdania said slowly. "I find that I miss her more and more with the passing of each day."

Ryun nodded. He hadn't thought that it would be like that, before. He hadn't realized how attached all three of them had become. And he had grown frustrated with not being able to progress the last few years. He

wished that Tali was in the Sect, she at least knew how to offer him advice that sparked insight in him, even when her advice was terrible. But she was away from the Sect, visiting her paramour, Sigmund, and basically acting as a go between the Sect, primarily Anrosh and the other big factions.

At least she liked her job, even if Ryun missed her, sometimes annoying presence.

“Is Selia still..?”

“She is,” Ryun confirmed. He could feel her through their bond, even though it was faint. Enough to know that she hadn’t died a true death. They were both growing impatient, the timeline that Selia had given them was a few years at most, it had been nearly ten. They worried.

Every once in a while, Ryun could feel some of her emotions, mostly frustration coupled with great desire to succeed. All they could do was continue on and hope that she was alright.

“So,” Erdania started. “We doing another one? I think that I felt something there at the end.”

They had been trying to replicate what Ryun and Selia had managed when in the throes of their Presence of the Eternal Hunters. To give their creation a piece of their souls, they had been failing for years. But they had improved their craft, of that there was no doubt.

“No, I don’t think that it would do any good. If we had the kesim ore...”

“It will come in a month, don’t worry,” Erdania told him. “You need to stop letting him get to you. You know that he does it on purpose.”

Ryun grimaced. “He grates on my nerves.”

The Herald of the Machine made Ryun... think many unpleasant thoughts. It was... odd, and disturbing to him, he realized it. He knew that he shouldn’t let him rile him so, but it always inevitably happened.

“If it is any consolation, you probably grate on his nerves too.”

Ryun glanced at her and narrowed his eyes.

“What?” Erdania said. “You do.”

“He is the centuries old ruler of an empire, yet he somehow finds the time to annoy me.”

“Ha,” Erdania chuckled. “Says the young upstart that forced that said centuries old ruler to back down and share the spoils of the war. I swear, you and Nayra both are so oblivious, you didn’t think that might, I don’t know, annoy him?”

Ryun turned away. “I guess, but it’s gone too far. It’s been years!”

Erdania smiled as they walked out of the forge. “My guess is that he likes it, though he won’t admit it. He had probably been like you, feeling alone and without a worthy match. Though I don’t think that he realizes it.”

Ryun frowned, thinking. It wasn’t such a big concern if he was being truly honest. Sure, he and the Herald glared at each other every time they were in a room together, but that only happened like... three times in the last decade.

It isn’t an issue for the tenuous world alliance, it wasn’t like Ryun was the head of the Sect factions. Sure, Hitor liked to call on him from time to time, but for the most part Ryun was left to his devices. To grow strong and prepare.

And he had done that for the most part, he advanced to Peak Ascended, and he was pretty sure that he knew how to advance to Eternal. Though, he wasn’t going to until Selia was back. He felt like he needed her and their connection here in order to make it work. The Sect had grown, Embesh and Ender had expanded the Sect’s farms and had made them one of the primary providers of foodstuffs to all the Sects and even some of the factions outside of their borders. Most of the Twilight Melody wealth came from their efforts.

Ryun didn't devote much of his time to the sect if he was being honest, that was Anrosh's job. He contributed with a few items of solid quality, but most of his time he spent training, preparing for what was about to happen.

The war had changed many things. As much as he was annoyed by the Herald, Ryun had to admit that at least he was willing to do what needed to be done. For the first time, ever probably, the world was united. Or at least pointed in the right direction. Those who were reticent had been... persuaded by those who held the real power. Hitor, The Grey Horde, and the Herald of the Machine, spearheaded the world that survived Hastur's dome. Even if some wanted to still bury their heads in the sand, those three were not about to let them.

The domes were being prepared for. All were watched, and now they knew that they had a counter. It had started ticking the moment the Ninth Iteration arrived. Twenty-seven domes, released in the batches of nine, every nine years.

They weren't going to let them get to that point. The plan was to open the domes on purpose, prepare for them and destroy the threats inside before they could develop. Hastur had nearly brought the world to its knees, but Hastur had been a mind and dream manipulator. The other domes would be different. Some held armies, other held just a single monster. Everyone agreed that their power varied, that each had its strength and weakness.

They had teams studying the domes from the inside, trying to figure out what the threats were based on what they could see inside. Compiling lists of what amount of power they believe would be required to contain and destroy a dome.

At least Ryun was confident enough that his Sect could handle any Dome they were assigned. He wasn't so sure about the others. But that was not his headache to deal with. Preparations were being made even in Twilight Melody Sect. Supplies for the trips and support of armies were needed collected, Anrosh organizing it all. Nayra spent most of her time

expanding the borders and training the troops, she at least seemed to enjoy it, compared to Anrosh who seemed to have developed a permanent grouchy face.

“So, what’re we doing now?” Erdania asked, though he was pretty sure that she knew the answer.

“What else, we go train.”