2043 : Master of Forgery

Now that the small bar of silver alloy was ready, Sunny summoned Weaver's Needle and manifested two additional pairs of hands.   
  
He also manifested a second incarnation, this one raising a dark hammer.  
  
"This next part… is a practice run. Just to see if I can actually enchant something that is being burned in your soul flame."  
  
Nephis sighed.  
  
Before, she had only used her Aspect to ignite the fire — it continued to burn on its own, so she did not need to use her powers to maintain it. Therefore, she did not have to endure the suffering of her Flaw.   
"What do you need me to do?"  
  
Sunny lingered for a while, then smiled.  
  
"First, let's try something simple. Just send your essence outward and don't resist when I try to take control of it. Think of it like healing your followers at a distance, but without intent or target."  
 In reality, all Awakened knew how to control their soul essence well enough to just pour it aimlessly into the world. However, that way, it quickly dissipated — Sunny needed something more meaningful. Luckily, the way Transcendent souls interacted with the world was special, and far less limited by boundaries.

Nephis nodded softly and closed her eyes.  
  
In the next moment, Sunny could feel her presence growing stronger. The radiance of the dancing flame was suddenly brighter, and the fire itself surged. The shadows gathered in the dark chamber turned stark and sharp, with a gust of warm wind throwing his hair into disarray.   
Shifting his gaze, Sunny could almost see rays of blinding light pouring from the seven radiant stars that burned within Neph's soul.  
  
He took a deep breath.  
  
'Now… can I actually manipulate her essence?'  
  
As he focused on the beautiful light, a triangular serpentine head rose from the shadows beneath his feet. Serpent slivered up his leg and coiled around his body, turning into an extensive black tattoo.   
  
Its [Shadow Guide] and [Spirit Guide] Attributes could very well prove helpful in this process.

Feeling a slight tingling in his fingers, Sunny reached toward the rays of radiant light and tried to grasp them.

It felt strange, trying to touch light.

And yet, unexpectedly, it worked.

Sunny was startled by how easy it was. Nephis seemed surprised, too, as if she felt something.

A moment later, her radiant essence easily escaped his control, as if rebelling against foreign touch.

His fingers tingled once more…

Was his ability to manipulate essence simply the consequence of possessing Bone Weave, or was Soul Weave involved, as well?

In any case, it seemed that Sunny could not control someone else's soul essence against the will of its master, even when it was dispersed freely outside their body.

Nephis froze for a moment, then shook her head.

"Sorry… I didn't mean to resist. It was just an instinct. I'll try to hold back this time."

Sunny nodded and reached toward the radiant light once more.

This time, the blinding rays did not escape his touch.

Guiding them cautiously, he began the familiar task of weaving essence into ethereal strings — only this time, the strings were not the familiar black, but instead bright and beautiful like pure starlight.

While his original body was busy creating essence strings, the avatar placed the alloy bar into the white flames.

Some time later, the alloy had heated up, starting to glow with an angry white glow. Not wasting any time, Sunny pulled it from the fire and placed it on the anvil.

A deafening thunderclap resounded when his hammer fell on the piece of incandescent metal. A powerful shockwave was released, and the Brilliant Emporium shook a little.

Behind him, Nephis leisurely raised her hands and pressed them against her ears.

'Focus…'

Sunny split his consciousness between two tasks.

One of his incarnations was hammering the bar of alloy into a suitable shape, while the other was starting to infuse it with the basis of a simple spellweave.

The metal was truly colder than a frozen hell. It cooled swiftly, forcing Sunny to plunge it into the furnace over and over again. Luckily, his guess had been right. The ethereal strings woven from Neph's own soul essence did not immediately burn to ash in the incandescent glow of her fire, withstanding it for now… his own shadow strings would have been destroyed in mere moments.

More than that, something strange was happening to the weave as it was washed by the soul flame. It was… changing, somehow. The patterns remained the same, but the feeling it gave Sunny was different — more profound, substantial, and integrated into the silver metal on a deeper level.

'Curious.'

That allowed Sunny to concentrate on the forging itself — not that there was a lot for him to do.

Usually, a smith would face a lot of challenges depending on their intent and the quality of the materials at their disposal. A sword like tachi, for example, involved a rather complicated forging process, with softer and harder metals needed to create varied rigidity between the edge and the spine.

A metal of low quality would need to be heated, folded, and hammered countless times to remove impurities and make the blade uniform along all of its length… and so on.

But Sunny was using an alloy that was beyond any mundane metal, and the design of the weapon he was forging was rather simple. So, he did not need to think about anything except precision.

And power.

The sublime alloy Sunny had created had to be resilient enough to endure being wielded by Nephis, so it was quite stubborn. Reshaping it with a hammer was no easy task. Sunny had to apply all of his fearsome Transcendent strength to each strike, which was a truly harrowing amount of force.

With each strike, a deafening thunderclap resounded, and powerful currents of wind were stirred. The Marvelous Mimic trembled and groaned, as if trying to complain.

As Sunny's hand rose and fell, lean muscles rolled under his glistening skin, making him seem like a statue chiseled from white marble. Incandescent sparks swarmed around his flawless figure, and white flames reflected in his onyx eyes. The scales of his black tattoo seem to glimmer like gemstones.

Nephis leaned back, enjoying the view.

However, after a while, there was a loud crack, and Sunny grew motionless.

His eyes narrowed, and his lips twisted into a grimace.

"Damnation."

Lowering the hammer, he looked at the debris laying at his feet, and sighed.

"...We're going to need a tougher anvil."