2048 : Different Foundations

Sunny took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly.

"It will become a Memory?"

Master Alice nodded.

"Yes! In fact, that is how most Memories produced by the forgemasters of Valor are made. A mundane weapon is forged, augmented by an Infuser, enchanted by a Scribe, and then turned into a Memory by a Forger. Of course, there are a million variations of the process, with different enchanters possessing different powers and strengths. But the basics are the same. And even if some Forgers can't copy the [Memory] quality, those who can pick up the slack."

She paused for a moment, then added with a sigh:

"There are more elaborate methods of Forgery, as well. Some of us can simply duplicate Memories, some can transfer particular enchantments — and so on. More powerful of the forged Memories are the result of carefully collecting suitable enchantments and transferring them to a single vessel, almost like assembling a perfect weapon from building blocks. Well, I won't bore you with details… suffice it to say that there is space for artistry in this process, too."

With that, Alice activated her Aspect once more. As Sunny watched, bewildered, the steel arrowhead in her right hand was suddenly enveloped by emerald light. Some time later, weak wisps of similar light started to shine from beneath the surface of the bone arrowhead, which she was holding in her left hand, as well.

Soon, the similar filigree of runes started to reveal itself on the ivory surface of the bone, as if burned into it from within by the emerald light.

Shifting his vision, Sunny peered beneath the surface of the bone arrowhead and held his breath.

Something miraculous was happening there, right in front of his eyes.

A storm of soul essence poured into the black abyss contained within the small piece of bone, drowning it in soft radiance. The cloud of essence drifted in the darkness, shining like a vast nebula… but then, its contours changed, becoming sharper and more defined.

Then, empty spaces revealed themselves between the wisps of shining gas, slowly growing as the strands of essence were compressed tighter and tighter. Turning into strings.

A spellweave was being born.

Sunny suppressed a sincere desire to applaud and simply put on an admiring smile.

"This is… amazing."

Master Alice sighed.

"Is it? Well… I guess so. The first few times — maybe a few dozen times — I was amazed, as well. However, there is certainly room for improvement. For example, it is usually too difficult for me to replicate Transcendent enchantments. I also spend too much essence on each attempt — this one is my first for the day, but starting from around the third, I'll have to substitute my own essence with soul shards. It costs quite a penny."

Sunny shook his head.

"Still."

Internally, he was thinking about something else.

So far… what both Infusers and Forgers did sounded a lot like the early stages of his own journey as a sorcerer, only built on a different foundation.

The foundation Sunny had used was observation, study, and understanding. By examining countless weaves, he slowly learned to separate particular patterns of ethereal strings from the radiant tapestries. Then, he deciphered the meaning of some patterns, and learned how to replicate them.

For the longest time, his entire repertoire was nothing but replication. Just like the petite enchantress had said, it was very much like assembling a Memory from building blocks — only, in his case, Sunny had to prepare the blocks himself. Later, he attained some liberty in how to implement them, thus gaining the ability to attune the copied enchantments according to his needs.

The foundation the forgemasters of Valor used, though, was based on power and happenstance. There was a lot of skill and shrewd calculation involved in how they created Memories, sure, but they ultimately relied on the unique nature of their Aspects instead of understanding.

Funnily enough, at that stage, the result was the same. A Memory Sunny could create a few years ago would have hardly been superior to a Memory created in the forges of Clan Valor.

The difference, though, was that the path these enchanters followed was static, while his was not. Since the forgemasters relied on their Aspects to forge Memories, they were doomed to be forever limited by the boundaries of their Aspects.

But Sunny could develop and learn. His only limit was his enlightenment and comprehension. So, even though he had been no different from a Forger in the past, he was infinitely more capable than any of them could ever be now.

He had already delved into the very essence of weaving, gleamed its secrets, and grown capable of creating unique enchantments instead of copying the ones provided by the Spell — therefore, he did not need to follow someone else's blueprint, or be limited in what he could build by the shape of available blocks.

If he was correct, then his current level was akin to the most revered rank among the forgemasters — the Spellsmith… or maybe even already beyond that.

If not, then it was going to be soon.

Sunny smiled politely.

"What about the Spellsmiths, then?"

Master Alice glanced at her partner, then shrugged.

"Those are very few. All of them are members of the Valor family, and most are direct descendants — the children and grandchildren of the Warden. This guy here is a rare exception, since he is at best a very distant cousin to Princess Morgan… oh, and to you too, Princess Nephis!"

She beamed at Nephis, then sighed wistfully.

"Spellsmiths… can imbue armaments with mystical traits and enchantments directly, without having to copy them from somewhere else. I'm not really sure how it works, but their Aspects are all rather unique. They also possess a wealth of knowledge, the best equipment, and receive the most resources. Well, no wonder — after all, the senior and most distinguished Spellsmith of the royal clan is the King himself. His craft… it's on a different level, entirely. Almost miraculous."

The petite woman glanced at Master Snow and added in a slightly embarrassed tone:

"This guy can explain better. He'll be done with the current task in a bit, and then, you'll be able to see a demonstration."

Sunny nodded. He had surmised that Master Snow was the kind of artisan who got completely absorbed by his work — so, it wasn't wise to try to distract him now. If anything, he was surprised that Master Alice was so accommodating.

There… she was staring at them again, wasn't she?

His smile almost faltered.

"I have a couple more questions, if you don't mind."

The petite woman shook her head energetically and picked up a second bone arrowhead.

"Oh, of course! By all means. Anything you want, Master Sunless... I mean... no, n—not anything! I didn't mean it that way..."

Sunny stared at her for a moment while considering his words.

"Forgemasters can also create Echoes, can't they? I've seen a few."

Master Alice nodded with relief.

"Y—yes — in theory. And we do, sometimes. Forgers can create very crude automatons, while Spellsmiths can create true artificial Echoes. The process is not much different from forging Memories, just… way more time-consuming. It can take a senior Spellsmith an entire year or more to craft a single Echo. By comparison, dozens of Memories can be crafted in the same span of time. So, artificial Echoes are quite rare. They are mostly forged out of curiosity, for research, or to test yourself."

Sunny nodded. It made sense, somewhat. Echoes were never equal to the original, so arming Awakened elites well was a more efficient way of spending resources.

And then, finally, the last question… not the most important of them, but one of great interest to Sunny personally.

"And… the names. Who comes up with the names for the forged Memories? And the descriptions?"

Master Alice seemed a little surprised by the question.

"Uh… excuse me?"

Sunny leaned forward.

"Well, you know. This bone arrowhead you made into a Memory. Did you give it a name? Something like, I don't know… [Bonehead]? [Bone and Arrow]?"

The petite woman gave him a strange look, then shook his head.

"Oh, no… the Spell names them for me. Some of the Spellsmiths have the ability to name and describe their creations personally, but most don't."

She lingered for a moment, then added politely:

"If you are curious, Master Sunless, I can check…"

The petite woman turned her head and stared into the air, clearly studying the runes.

"Huh. That's strange…"

For a moment, Master Alice had an incredulous expression on her face. Then, she shook her head with a hint of bafflement.

"The Spell seemed to have named it… [All Aboard]? What does it even mean? How... embarrassing..."