

CHAPTER 179 – THE BRONZE GRIND

Sam put chunks of Copper and Tin ore into the Artisan Orb, beginning the crafting process of yet another [Bronze Ingot].

He was determined to push this ingot to at least a +1 quality. He wanted that extra Blacksmithing Experience.

The heat of the [Mobile Forge] was intense within the ramshackle workshop. It didn't bother him much, though. Apparently high Vigor, a decent enough Fire Affinity, and his connection to the [Archflame] counted for a lot.

It sure bothered everyone else, though.

Sam wondered if all of that combined with his [Skin Tempering] from Blacksmith made him nearly immune to any sort of Fire damage. He wasn't keen on testing it out, but it was an interesting thought, nonetheless.

There were a number of things he could do to influence whether the craft he was attempting was a critical success, also known as a "+1" or high-quality result.

He could use tools in a slightly different way than normal, placing care and emphasis on making every step in the process perfect as he could make it.

Sam had originally thought that using certain tools would boost his chances, but that didn't appear to be the case. They all, provided they were on his person, gave their respective bonuses much like stats on his other equipment.

Stats were always effective as well, since it seemed to have some relation to the recipe level and his Profession's level. That was part of why Komachi's [Heroic Rock] had been so impactful.

Unfortunately, she was out foraging for more ingredients. Or rather, more stock to sell. With considerably more rel to work with, she promised to pull in even better materials.

As a result, there was no boost to his Strength and Vigor at present. He had to rely completely on himself to push this [Bronze Ingot] to a higher quality.

Raiko, Lenal, and Matt had found a new cave that was plentiful with resources. It had been one of the spots that the crystalline creature was fetching ore from.

The [Metal Crystals] sitting nearby were one such evidence of that place. He felt the itch to go and explore, see what else the cave might have to offer, but he needed to keep working at the forge.

There was a special commission to complete, and the kingdom quest to make progress on besides. Everybody wanted a better workshop, partially because Bal'daz hinted that it might provide a crafting boon while within the building.

After he dropped that hint, it was a mad stampede for everyone to get back to crafting.

There were also some additives he learned he could add to a recipe to enhance it in various ways that were previously unthinkable.

His [Mobile Forge] increased the effectiveness of [Fire Crystals], but they weren't usually *necessary* for crafting itself. A number of combustible materials were fine to use instead of crystals.

However, when using [Fire Crystals], or the Heat from the Archflame itself, Sam was able to increase the quality of most of his crafts.

He went from creating a [Bronze Ingot +1] every 10 or so attempts to one in every 4 or 5. A drastic increase that only got better with each level, giving him a hint that it was also level based.

The higher Sam's level was over the recipe, the higher his chance of producing a high-quality result.

It made sense. And it gave an incentive to craft things that were well below his Blacksmith level instead of always aiming for something that was beyond his reach.

A high-quality result also netted him extra Experience, no matter how high above the recipe's level he was.

He had to admit, it was quite pleasing to see a direct result from his efforts. By applying himself, and a little ingenuity, he was able to improve his creations. And gain even more Experience for it.

Early that morning when he woke up, Matt had a small rough box filled with crystalline jars of glue. He must have stayed up all night to do it. He had certainly looked it.

But that left Sam and Kai to finish the rest of the materials needed to construct the [Workshop]. Sam couldn't wait and had dove right into his Blacksmithing without doing anything else.

He not only wanted to get the new building put up—and he was honestly quite curious how it would get constructed—but he wanted to get the Experience from the kingdom quest.

Sam wasn't alone in that regard.

Kai was hard at work too, grinding out plank after plank of wood. The sound of sawing was a constant background noise to Sam's hammer blows.

Unfortunately for Sam, much of what Bal'daz required was not simple materials. He needed [Bronze Plates], [Bronze Sheets]—which Sam didn't know existed and were nothing more than plates

beaten even thinner—[Bronze Nails], [Bronze Rivets], and [Bronze Hinges].

Sam kept the [Mobile Forge] stocked with Heat from the Archflame, which he preferred to the crystals, and occasionally fed it with some of the [Cindercoal] from the newly changed Tile.

The stuff was *everywhere*, and Chompers was more than happy to go grab some in return for scraps of some of Sam's failures. The mimic ate just about anything, and Sam was more than happy to feed the little guy.

He even gave him three [Bronze Sheets] when Chompers came back and dumped a mini-truckload of [Cindercoal] into the corner, his blackened tongue panting excitedly.

As if in thanks for being fed, Chompers spit out some [Grade 1 Alkahest] that Sam gladly collected.

Sam couldn't believe that they had a mimic that was so loyal and helpful. The little thing only wanted to be useful and be loved. Sam was ecstatic that the rest of the people in Sil'mara took to the mimic so warmly.

It was a bit touch-and-go with Lenal and Raiko, but they had warmed up to Sir Chompers the Third far faster than he would have otherwise expected.

The [Cindercoal] was used to heat his forge, but in a roundabout way. He fed the coal to the Archflame, which drastically increased its Heat and seemed to increase the recovery rate of the flame for a short while too.

Using the coal in such a way was significantly more effective than just shoveling the coal into the small forge he had.

Sam still wanted to make connecting pipes and networks beneath his feet so that he could use the Archflame directly rather than having to channel a lot of its Heat through himself.

It was more tiring that way, far more than swinging a hammer all day, that's for sure.

He missed Komachi's company, but was glad that she was doing something more than hanging out with him. She was her own person now, not a pet.

She deserved to have a full and rich life, just like anybody else.

As Sam created another [Bronze Sheet +1], he smiled as the familiar level up sensation rolled through his aching and tired muscles. He set the sheet aside and began on the next [Bronze Ingot] that would, eventually, become a [Bronze Sheet].

Sam worked through the day, eating only when his stomach wouldn't stop complaining. Kai seemed to have the same drive, and the two ate quickly, then returned to their work as fast as possible.

They weren't competing, not really, and yet it was kind of fun wondering how far along Kai was. If he was ahead of Sam or not, and what Sam could do to make sure that the smithing ingredients were done before Kai's.

Judging by the list of materials needed, most of the items were Carpenter-based. That put a bit of an unfair burden on Kai, but then again, he only needed to make dimensional lumber. Planks, boards, beams and the like.

Sam had the more complicated bits that would hold most of Kai's wooden parts together, and Raiko's [River Glass] too. Matt's contribution was the added adhesive that would keep everything standing for years to come.

To top it off, Komachi [Commissioned] each order for the building, increasing everyone's Experience gains even further. She put rel into the quest too, seeming sure it might affect the building's quality.

While Sam's ignorance of construction was massive, he knew enough that the whole process of putting together even a small shack was going to be laborious and difficult.

Hell, just helping Kai put this thing together that sort of grew up around their individual crafting stations was a chore, even with Sam's Strength and Vigor doing the heavy lifting—no pun intended.

Chompers scuttled out of the room. Neither the noise, the heat, nor the smells bothered the mimic, but he was like a little puppy, always looking for the next thing to play with.

Thankfully, unlike a puppy, he didn't explore the world entirely with his mouth.

There'd be a whole lot less world if that was the case.

Hours drifted by as Sam fell back into the flow of crafting with the aid of the Archflame and his Artisan Orb. He preferred the orb for complex actions that would require a host of tools.

The final item he needed, [Bronze Hinges], was a good example of this.

With crafting, there were multiple ways to tackle any recipe and Sam often chose the Artisan Orb for anything with too many parts, like the hinges.

If he had done things normally, he would need to beat the [Bronze Plates] into shape, cut them to size, roll holes for the pin, and the list went on.

Sam was a bit sad to admit that the [Bronze Hinges] were the most complex thing he'd crafted to date. Most of everything he'd done so far was tier 2 or 3 materials, but the hinge was tier 4 owing to the fact that it took tier 3 materials to make.

Each tier of material used in the recipe increased its difficulty, and though the [Bronze Hinge] didn't require many items, they were all tier 3.

Sam's luck, however, was still with him. He managed to succeed on the first three, only blowing up the fourth result because he had let his guard down and relaxed too much while twisting the metal with his mana deep inside the glowing Artisan Orb.

Being a higher-level recipe, Sam was able to pull out two more Blacksmithing levels, finally putting his Profession at half the level of his Path.

And, naturally, netting another Voidknight level in the process.

Originally, Sam wasn't too fond of the way his Legend would only go up if he leveled his Path, Profession, or Job. Mostly because he had lacked a Profession for so long.

It felt clunky and almost random at first, until he figured out that it was essentially an average of his levels. One that felt drastically more accurate once he'd gotten his Profession.

The words that Sam had been waiting for still failed to manifest. *I really need some of those Blacksmith abilities!*

It wasn't like arguing with the Shard would give him what he wanted. He bent his nose to the proverbial grindstone and finished the last [Bronze Hinge].

They weren't quite *easy* to make, but things were definitely less taxing than they had originally been, enough that Sam felt comfortable enough to try smelting those iron [Demon Coins] into [Iron Ingots].

He didn't know what level the recipe was. He guessed that with all the recipes around bronze still being on or above his level at level 15 Blacksmith, that iron items were quite a bit higher yet.

After all, it seemed Blacksmith had a natural cadence to it. There were tiers to each metal, almost like Ranks, and during that tier you spent most of your time working with that specific metal.

Sam was getting intimately familiar with the ductility and strength that bronze provided. He could even alter the ratio of tin to copper to provide greater rigidity or ductility, which was something he couldn't have wrapped his head around even a day or two ago.

Just as Sam was coming out of his singed workshop room, he caught Kai coming out of his section with a heap of lumber.

They both looked at each other and hurried toward the exit where they were to pile the ingredients Bal'daz needed. Neither wanting to be last.

Their friendly rivalry, however, was interrupted by the sight before them.

Finally, a beleaguered Komachi returned to the settlement, hauling a merchant cart heaped with materials. The poor thing was struggling to pull the heavy burden. No matter how high her strength might have been, she was still a small creature with largely magical stats.

They threw aside their burdens and ran to Komachi's side.