

Forged in Fire...

Days passed by since Alicia started to learn from Ashlan. Through training a completely new branch of skills had been discovered, one she invested in heavily to even the odds. Along with another notable one apparently innate to her spider nature.

Racing Tempo

Intense activity encourages hemolymph circulation towards extremities, improving speed gradually.

Higher levels improve graduation rate and peak speed limit.

Rank III: Moderately increases skill parameters.

Surge

Allows rush of strength to saturate the muscular tissue for short duration. Repetitive use may cause atrophic damage.

Higher levels improve strength gain factor and duration.

Rank III: Strength gain by factor of 1.3 for 0.3 seconds

Anger is power... Unleash it!

Unarmed

Base for unarmed combat specialist techniques.

Rank IV: Considerably improves unarmed combat proficiency.

Art of Mars ☼

Art of war and combat. Has no effect. Base for specialist combat techniques.

Currently contains:
Armed VI
↳ Blade arts VI
Unarmed VI

Armed

Base for armed combat specialist techniques.

Rank VI: Tremendously improves armed combat proficiency

Blade arts

Proficiency in bladework affects all bladed weapons proportional to the ratio of the blade.

Rank VI: Tremendously improves bladework. Effectiveness coefficient improved by factor of 1.6

True grit

Forced movement of body, ignoring debilitating effects.

Rank III: Ignores all paralyzing effects

If I am to die today, I'll die fighting. Until my bones are ground to dust.

Falling star

Successful plunge attacks redirects rebound force back into target. Eliminating damage caused by sudden change in velocity.

Recently she was told that there was nothing else left to be learned from him technique-wise and the only thing that was left to do was reinforce the basics, practice techniques, gain experience, remember what she learned and master her own style. After all even if you were to learn all there is to learn from someone, without further expanding upon the said knowledge will eventually lead to stagnation. During their sessions Alicia never managed to decisively win against Ashlan. *'Just when I was catching on to his tricks too... let me beat you once you damn sly geezer.'*

Her mentor advised her to broaden her experience by facing the predatory monsters native to the forest to gain such experience. For this she needs a weapon. To address this she was sent to meet the old friend of her master, a dwarven blacksmith who lives away from the main village that should have her weapon ready by now. *'I can't just take the old man's deathstick. Apparently he has sentimental attachments to it. Besides, getting a whole new sword is better...*

While they don't mind the extra protein, they don't actively hunt for food so none of them are knowledgeable about... pretty much anything related to the creatures other than what they think they can run away from. Unfortunate but I think I know someone who might be able to help me.'

'Is that it?' Weathered down stone shack together with a clay charcoal kiln and a hill of logs piled higher than it; all in a compound. Lit kiln and gray brick chimney spouting ceaseless smoke give away that there's someone in the building. Tapping a few times on the wooden door gently... seconds pass... No reply... again louder this time... minutes pass... still no reply...

'Is no one home? No way right? You wouldn't just have a lit fire going and leave it. That's a disaster waiting to happen.' Clearing her doubts she started to bang on the door. Not a second later.

- "Aye kheerd ye well enough ðe fyerst time!"

From inside a muffled furious bellowing of someone with a thick accent could be heard. Sound of thundering steps came closer to the and metallic objects banging against each other drew near the door.

- "Quit smack'n me door! Or aye'll hammer some manners n'to ye!"

Nearly kicking open the door, a rough looking stout man came out with his soot covered face. Heatwaves of a burning furnace that would be unbearable to anyone without conditioning billowed out.

- "Told ye yer blasted broadheads ain't done!-"

Stocky limbs, short stature, ashen beard, tough textile in an apron like fashion, fitting various tools of metallurgy. Hands and forearms covered in hardened calluses and skin dappled in burn scars, holding a sledgehammer. Seeing that it was someone other than who he expected, his storming rage seemed to subside if only a little. Still his fiery red eyes reminiscent of flames from a forge held some intensity.

- "Ryght, Alisha ain't it?"

Being caught up in man's tantrum delayed her responses.

'I think he was serious about hammering me...'

- "Uhm No, I mean yes but it's Alicia. Are you Greimen?"
- "-Stolthamar. Nöne other."
- "Don't remember introducing myself. How did you know me?"

Letting lose a small scoff the blacksmith replied.

- "Hah! Ye serious? ðe head on yer shoulders for show only? Whöle damn village's bustling with yer name on the lips of every single one em'. Aye'd hafta be blind deaf and daft to not know ye!"

Quick speech coupled with the man's unusual articulation had Alicia grasping at straws to follow.

- "'Sides hear you's a givin that cinderhead a prop'r beatin!"
- "Are you talking about Ash? I don't think beating is the right word... just keeping up with his techniques are already a handful..."

'Honestly it's the other way around...'

- "Hmph, stop with yer moping and höld yer head up hygh. That döggd snag was a herö in his time. Not some rural brat or hygh-headed snöt raised on skeew'd fairytales of those stöle wear'n snakes but a true herö forged by blööd and bönes. Folk who can say that ðey can keep with such a man are few.

Here for ye blade ain't cha? Come in."

Stepping in after being 'welcomed', Alicia took in the inside of the building. Walls lined with various tools, racks holding incomplete armor and weapons, raw ores of iron, tin and copper stacked in corners. The house lacked windows to let light in, thus having a dark and gloomy atmosphere.

- "Have a gander at that."

On a table where he indicated by him laid a polished greatsword, next to it it's scabbard. Length of it comparable to the height of Alicia's elven form. She picked it up to get a feel for its weight: *'Light... feels like a cardboard cutout than a real weapon...'*

- "Like it? You can have it if ye want."
- "Do you have anything bit shorter...? And heavier...?"

At her question his eyes seemed to lit up.

- "Hooh? Töugh lassy eh? Wöuld love to make ye a blade out of titanium or an adamantite, too bad ðey cost a small förtune. If ye want a weapon made öut öf something else bring it in. Otherwise look aröund might find what yer lookin for."
- "Ah it's fine I'll take this."

As she was making her way back holding her new weapon something caught her attention. A bucket of dark blue¹ colored iridescent scraps of metal with mineral like almost jewel exterior,² though outlandish in its appearance and despite it being the first time encountering the material it felt oddly familiar. Squatting down to pick up a piece... there was a considerable weight to it even though it was a small scrap.

- "Hey... What about this? Can you make something with this?"

Incited by Alicia's voice the smith looked over his shoulder immediately his expression changed to something ambiguous.

- "Aye that one... Göt it from some peddler scam claiming it was lumetrium. Called him öut on it, töld me he had found it in some abandöned ruins, looked shiny enöugh for him to think it was worth söomething. Sort of similar to lumetrium, the colör and all. Tried to trick

¹ Approximate color; tolopea

² Approximately Adamantine lustre

others, ðey didn't buy it wörth shite. Then start'd to rave aböut this thing's been givin em nightmares. Scared pale as a bloodsucker.

Desperate to get at least a bite of bread for it. Thing is never seen anything like it in me thöusand something years of liv'n, pint sized wee thing yet so bürdensome. Töök it from em for a half dried bread an' a bag of nuts. Ran off thank'n me for free'n em fröm his curse. Anyway later I fired up me forge and put it in, couldn' git it red! Think'd böut make'n bauble trinket öut of it. Lest ye can make a fire hötter than me forge, forget it aböut it."

'Iron and steel should get red hot around 500 celsius...³ Wonder if I can use my Pyroblast to heat it up... My formula should be burning at around 3,000 degrees celsius. I have to mind the intensity and make sure it's a neutral flame...'

"Could be oricalcum... no... if so then it wöuldn't be bröken like this... Must be something else..."

His mutterings went unheard as Alicia was in deep thought.

- "Let me try something then..."

Alicia's ease of handling the heavy bucket of unusual material surprised the dwarf. Interested in what she was going to do he halted his current work and quickly cleaned up his station. The furnace with crimson and orange coke fuel in its hearth, massive bellows to funnel air in at the side, and a cooling tank filled with viscous oil at the front was presented to her...

- "Aye can man the bellöws for ye."

- "It's okay that won't be necessary."

'If this world has the Nitrogen rich atmospheric composition then it'll kill the fire more than it flares it.'

Pulling in the new coal piled up around it into the firepit and pouring in the bucket of materials on the flames, embers erupted upwards. Holding her hands above and close to it, breathing in deep.

< Atmo-genesis >

↳ C_2H_2

↳ O_2

< Pyroblast >

³ Around 932 fahrenheit

Orange feathering flames spurt forth in strength engulfing every inch of the material. Adjusting the mixture the fire morphed and changed. Briefly flashing bright white before turning its preferred blue, Alicia carefully observed the flames to match the outer cone to its inner cone. From roaring into hissing, the teal blue flame and its intense temperatures focused solely on the metal.

- "Bloody devil's fyre..."

Agape watching the unnatural flames generated by Alicia's magic, aged smith looked on in awe. Sweat trickled down from her head, heart pounding faster by the moment. Not a minute later... the metal started to turn dull red before turning orange.

>Notification. By current estimations administrators will be depleted of energy before completion of heating process. Pre-emptive action recommended.

'Got any idea then?'

>Affirmative. Promotion of skill < Spiritual pool > to rank 5 will greatly improve maximum energy reserves and restoration rate. Supplying the ideal energy output for current action. Promotion action will cost 4 points. 13 points will remain after execution.

'Sure, go ahead. I burnt through tons of points recently huh, tackling on beasts in the forest should net me some more. Another reason to go out hunting huh.'

Spiritual pool☆
Expands the magical energy pool and its restoration rate.

Higher levels further expands the pool and hasten the regeneration speed

Rank V: Significantly increases skill parameters.

After the skill was improved it as if something heavy was taken off her body.

'Ahh... that's much better... Alright let's get this over with.'

With her newfound stamina she intensified the flames. From the extreme temperatures cracks and crevices formed on the forge walls. But finally the pile of materials started to become welded into each other, turning soft malleable in the process.

- "Lassie, Aye can take it from here. Ye seem tired. Take a break. I'll start hammering it n'to shape."
- "Thanks... I will..."

She mostly wanted to get cool air from the outside.

- "Could ye come över here?"

The smith asked from inside.

- "Me favörite hammer can't dent ðe shite, hafta use greathammer for this. Need ye to hold it in place."
- "Of course! But don't you have an assistant? Do you live here all by yourself?"
- "Take those tongs and hold it on the anvil. An' nay I dön't, what assistant can I get here? Scrawny squirrels⁴ here can't hold a hammer straight. Better off wörkin alöne."

Holding a two handed war hammer-like instrument with one head small and compact, intended to focus the force in a small area, the other one sharp and curved. Still although slim in design it was massive and heavy just from looking at it. The smith brought down the hammer onto the metal on the anvil in an overhead swing. Loud clanging evidence to the force great behind each strike.

- "Say höw'd ye get devil's fyre? Hear normal fólks can't create it. Couldn't be ordinary magic..."
- "It's just normal fire mixed with Oxyhydrogen. Blowing away the inflammable gas from the air will greatly improve the fire's temperature."

⁴ "Tree squirrel" is a somewhat derogatory term for Elves as squirrels are sometimes called 'tree rats'. Dwarven equivalent would be beardling. A small harmless pest that infests storehouses and can eat through food stores. Has a taste for beer and rum. Beardlings hold a resemblance to dwarves due to their unusually long fur growing from underneath their neck often long enough to be dragged on the ground and both of them share a taste for alcohol.

Old smith didn't understand about everything that Alicia had said but still he gained some insight into the process. In about fifteen minutes the metal cooled down enough to not change shape anymore. Putting it back into the forge heating it up, bringing it out again to strike into shape. This process repeated itself until many hours passed and at last the metal was shaped into something resembling a blade.

- "Can't make it into a longsword me thinks. Closer to a knightly sword, maybe even shorter. Is a single-handed weapon good enough for ye?"
- "Do what you think is best for it."

'Who am I to argue with a professional anyway. Smithing isn't in my portfolio.'

- "Well then, come tomorrow and you'll have it ready by then. Need to grind some sharpness into it and make the handle and the guard."
- "Thank you, I'll come back tomorrow then."
- "Watch yourself now."

As she exited the building, indigo skies of the belt of Venus instantly told her that it was twilight. *'Whoa it's dusk already? Time really flew by. I lost sense of time since there's no sunlight inside to tell me.'* Stretching lightly she went to spend the night in the elven village.

The next day, before she could even knock on the door. The dwarf came up to her. His slumped face and eyes that had dark circles signified his lack of sleep. However the light in his eyes was brighter than ever before.

- "Ye! Come in! Have a look at this beaut!"

Taken aback by his energy Alicia cautiously entered. On the rack, a single-edge straight sword with a dark blade that had iridescent properties, reflecting the blue spectrum of light... Its blade length is about 65-70cms. Although the design was simple, the crystal-like surface of it had an obscure appeal to it; looking more like a ceremonial sword than a genuine weapon.⁵

- "Try it!"

Picking it up there was a hefty weight to it. After examining it extensively and gaining a sense for the weight balance Alicia flourished with it. The blade left a

⁵ Alicia's weapon's outward appearance here is inspired by Dishonored's Corvo Attano's folding blade; Pathmaker. Except much longer. https://dishonored.fandom.com/wiki/Folding_Blade#Gallery

faint arc of obsidian purple behind it, unnoticed by the both of them. Swing at a prepared stand of armor it easily bit into it, stopping halfway through.

Whilst amazed at the efficacy of the weapon a smile bloomed on her face.

- "I like it... Thank you!"
- "Aye want to thank ye for helping me make it. Since ye töök part in making it you should give it a name."
- "Do I have to?"
- "Names are important, it realizes the name hölder and acknōwledges it. They are a powerful binding force to this wörld. Tis my best work yet!"
- "Best work? How about magnum opus?"
- "Masterwork? Eh... Not there yet... since it showed me something new how about..."

In the end they couldn't agree on a name...

- "I didn't have time for the scabbard sö take this."

He gave Alicia a pair of tough gloves.

- "Cut-resistant. Not visible but there's a ricassö⁶ so you can two hand it fröm there too. Take care now; don't want to see me work squandered.⁷ In this place, everyone has a death wish, desperate or böth."
- "You too. Don't stay up all night again!"
- "Haah! You söund like me nan."

With a wry smile Alicia parted from the smith with her new weapon. Once out of sight she wrapped the blade in silk and fastened it on her back. Contrast of pearly white and dark obsidian held a unique charm.

"Strange... When I hammer it no spallings cōme off... Even orichalcum wöuld löse some dust..."

⁶ Unsharpened or dull length of the blade above the weapon's guard which allows the user to grip from it.

⁷ Obvious reference to dark souls 3 smith.

In another time Greimen eventually took in an Elven assistant skilled with wind magic. Trying to apply what Alicia told him about making an intense fire. Through trial and error of many years eventually the two discovered the first gas forge, reaching temperatures previously unattainable. Becoming known as the infernal smith capable of creating masterful creations out of metals before known to be indomitable by fire... Though he still couldn't find the coveted devil's fire. Blue, intense enough to melt arms of steel...