The Sorcerer's Guide to the Multiverse

Chapter 40: Eye of the Tiger

『Akira Gojo』

Ever since absorbing the will of the past Bladesmiths, I had been busy. The day after, I started training for real, doing Bladsmith training in the morning and Swordsmanship training in the evening.

And I couldn't decide on which was more brutal.

Thwack!

"Too strong! Match your pace, regulate yourself! It doesn't matter if you can swing hard enough to crack the anvil, if you aren't swinging without focus, it will come out uneven!"

These Bladesmiths? They took their job seriously.

Really seriously.

A bit too seriously.

They collectively decided on the joint custody way of training me, each Blacksmith taking turns teaching me how to smith blades without any reservations or trying to hide their technique or family secrets. No one had mentioned the ritual but it was clear that the way they viewed me changed. Their eyes and attitudes towards me were full of expectation and by proxy, determination to train me to their utmost.

And they were *ruthless*.

I couldn't complain because I signed up for it, but it felt like a bootcamp. If I misjudged my swing, I'd take a swing of a reed to my back, or depending on the

bladesmith, splashed with water. Nothing that would truly hurt me, but very painful or very annoying.

However, they were taking time out of their precious work and teaching me without complaint, so I just gritted my teeth. According to one of the smiths, I was being treated relatively gently. They also told me the reason the punishment happened during the smithing process was to hone the smiths focus and make them more resistant towards distractions.

If I hadn't acquired the Forged in Fire trait, I probably wouldn't have been able to continue the training. But due to how fast I was improving, I forced myself to continue. According to every single Bladesmith, my talent was exceptional, more than anyone else they had met. And I could feel it, within every mistake was a lesson that I'd improve on next time. Like insight forged over hundreds over hundreds of years helping me along.

However, it was demotivating to see the first sword I made get inspected by my masters and then smashed against a rock until it broke.

Not good enough.

Using total concentration breathing and reinforcement, I struck with the hammer hard enough to match a hundred strikes by any other smith. I was fast, but that speed was also hindering me since it could lead me to make mistakes I couldn't iron out. I learned steady over fast or strong. Making the blade take shape over numerous steady strikes rather than a few impatient ones.

"The heating is uneven. Try again."

Sword 56 was thrown out just like that.

Blacksmithing(D-) -> Blacksmithing(D)

I learned how to heat and temper my swords, I learned how to keep their shape. How to hammer in a way that the blade formed properly. How to keep my focus. How to make the sword in the way I envisioned it. The shape, the curve, the

sharpness, the patterns, the weight, if any of them were unsatisfactory the sword would be ruthlessly shattered.

"The center of weight is off. Try again."

Goodbye sword 72.

Blacksmithing(D) -> Blacksmithing(D+)

However, that was not the only thing I was doing. In addition to hammering until I felt like my arms were about to fall off, in the evenings I'd go out and fight the Type Zero until I couldn't anymore. With each attempt, I felt like I was improving. I seldom repeated mistakes, but in the process of avoiding a mistake, I'd make a new one. And I kept repeating that dance of digging holes and climbing out of them.

Kenjutsu(D) -> Kenjutsu(D+)

Whether that was forcing myself to move more efficiently due to how little stamina I already had left by the time I was ready to train, or training my posture to keep steady and strong even when faced by half a dozen swings. Attack while dodging, stop giving ground, stop stepping back, face the blade, don't fall for feints.

Each of those lessons were taught with dozens of bruises.

Kenjutsu(D+) -> Kenjutsu(D++)

In these weeks which turned to months, I fought the puppet over and over again until I was intimately familiar with each setting of it. My swings and positioning slowly matching my breathing unconsciously. I learned to move my sword without thinking, moving it by instincts and how to leverage my positioning to make better use of it. I learned to match the tempo of my opponents better.

During that time, my only real company was Shinobu and Mitsuri who visited the Swordsmith village every other week to check up on me and to use the hot

springs. Though they always had sparks flying between each other for some reason.

It was an inhuman routine. Sleeping just 6 hours a day and laboring from day until night. Yet my body got tougher, and my breathing improved, I maintained the breathing without even having to focus on it. Despite not reaching the level of constant, I was beyond my previous level by a laughable degree.

Total Concentration Breathing(C) -> Total Concentration Breathing(C++)

When I wasn't doing those, I was going around depopulating a 100km perimeter around the village of any demons to use their cores for my nefarious means. Which included a recovery indoor hot spring to recover my sore muscles and promote recovery.

Also swallowing a few dozen of the cores got my Endurance Trait all the way to C+, increasing my stamina and resilience significantly which was needed for my brutal training regiment.

And my training was not fruitless.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

With such focus that the world around me did not exist, I was reinforcing my eyes to see even the slightest bump and dent in the metal despite the heat and light I hammered away like a machine. My strikes each containing a precision that couldn't be matched even by a machine. I made minute adjustments in my movements each time a part raised too unevenly due to the composition of the material and hammered it to uniform.

I placed the blade back in the furnace to heat it up evenly before pulling it out and plunging it into the water, quenching the blade. Once the blade was quenched, I pulled it out for tempering without even a hint of a tremor in my posture. Despite the aching muscles, I sharpened the blade with great care using the whetstone. And then I assembled it using the hilt and handle I had made myself.

Letting out a deep exhausted sigh, I held the blade and presented it towards the bladesmith who was watching me with crossed arms. I was so in the zone, I hadn't even noticed he hadn't struck me even one. He took the handle and ran his fingers over the edge before swinging the sword a few times.

"It's passable. It's a bit below standard, but the rank and file wouldn't complain about a sword like this one. It will kill."

Blacksmithing(D+) -> Blacksmithing(D++)

Hearing his evaluation, I couldn't help but shake in excitement.

"FUUUCK YEAAAH- guweh!"

Thwack!

I took a reed to the back of the head.

"I said it's passable! Not that you did good, it's too early to celebrate! You fool. Hmph! You are dismissed for today."

Despite him smacking me, I couldn't keep the smirk off my face. I'd done it. I finally made a sword that was not considered a piece of smoldering garbage by my masters! All that verbal and physical abuse paid off!

"Thank you for your lesson!"

Giving a bow to the man, I walked out of the smithy while leaving the sword behind. While it was good, it wasn't to the same quality as the ones I wielded and Her Majesty. And I wasn't so sentimental that I'd use the first sword I forged even if it was terrible. Even if you disregard the fact that it was not the first sword I forged.

Riding the high of my success, I took a bath and headed straight for the Type Zero doll up at the mountain. I felt like maybe I could beat it this time. But as I reached the clearing, I saw the kid, Kotetsu inspecting the doll with worry. As I stepped forward, he put his arms out.

"Wait! Stop! You can't fight it anymore, I'm putting a stop to it!"

As he said, I stopped in place and raised an eyebrow.

"But... why? Did I do something wrong? Do you want more candy? Is it an extortion scheme?"

He shook his head and sighed while looking at the doll. He looked very downtrodden.

"Can't you see? It's almost broken! At this rate it will be destroyed... and if it gets destroyed, no one can repair it anymore. My family is supposed to be maintaining it, but my father died unexpectedly years ago and now..."

I approached the young boy while listening to his story. I analyzed the cracks not on the doll but his posture.

"I'm supposed to be the one who can repair it, I'm the only one left of my bloodline, but I can't! I'm no good with swords or dolls, and at this rate if this doll breaks down, no one will be able to repair it anymore. So you can't fight it anymore!"

From where I stood, I could see the tears streaming down from behind his mask. That feeling of incompetence and not being able to match up to what your family did, why'd that feel so familiar again?

I placed a hand on his hair and roughly ruffled it, shaking him out of his fugue.

"Wanna know a secret?"

He sniffled.

"W-What is it?"

"I wasn't talented with the sword at all. Or smithing. Or anything in general."

Kotetsu looked up at me and I tried to give my most reliable reassuring smile.

"No way! You are lying to make me feel better!"

"Heh, it's true though. I toiled for years trying to get better but I never could. Until I found a way. Do you want to know how?"

He trembled as I knelt down to eye level.

"W-what is it?"

"It's cliché, but it is cliché for a reason. You have to keep trying, even if it seems useless, the moment you completely give up on it is when your fate is sealed. One day you'll find a way, a different angle you can tackle the problem with, and then you'll break through it. Maybe if you can't, you can help someone else to, or maybe you'll find someone who can help you make that breakthrough, or even a streak of wild luck. But no matter what, you cannot let the fear and feeling of futility rule you."

If I gave up on being a sorcerer, if I gave up on being better, I'd have never met Mayou and awakened my technique. If I gave up on persevering, I wouldn't have followed Alucard and awakened my cursed technique. There was no guarantee of things working out if you kept trying. But there was a guarantee of it never working out if you didn't.

The boy stopped crying and reached an arm under his mask to wipe his tears and snot away before turning to face me with a more determined look.

"You're right. I can't just give up, I can't stand in front of your progress just because I'm afraid I won't make any! If you break it, I'll rebuild it! Even if it takes me 10, no, 100 years! I'll do it one way or the other! So fight it! Go! Go!"

Watching him push on my leg trying to urge me towards the doll made me chuckle.

'He's cute, I wish I could have kids. Should we kidnap him?'

Probably not. If you want kids, I'll give you a bakers dozen, Alucard. In fact, I'll work on that as soon as I get you a body. But until then, I'm not kidnapping any kids.

Ignoring her noise of satisfaction I walked towards the doll and Kotetsu got into position behind it before inserting his key. I drew my blade and gripped it with both hands before focusing.

Let's trash this doll.

A/N: A training Arc! Numero Zwei! Akira is working hard, incredibly hard, basically a grueling schedule for anyone, both smithing and swordsmanship. But toil gives its reward, his skills are improving noticeably. And he can finally make his own swords now, and even fix and refurbish existing swords if you catch my drift.

Kotetsu and Akira have a moment, inadequacy is a language he speaks very well. While it's not the same kind of pressure, he knows the feeling of feeling like you'll never live up to the expectations of others and so he is among the best people to give a prep talk like that. Now, the only thing that remains to be seen if he can beat that doll after giving that prep talk or look like an idiot after saying all that. What did you guys think about the chapter? I'd love to know.