

# WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR



**KICKSTARTER  
BONUS SCENE!**

# SOULSMITH

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CRADLE : VOLUME TWO

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SOULSMITH

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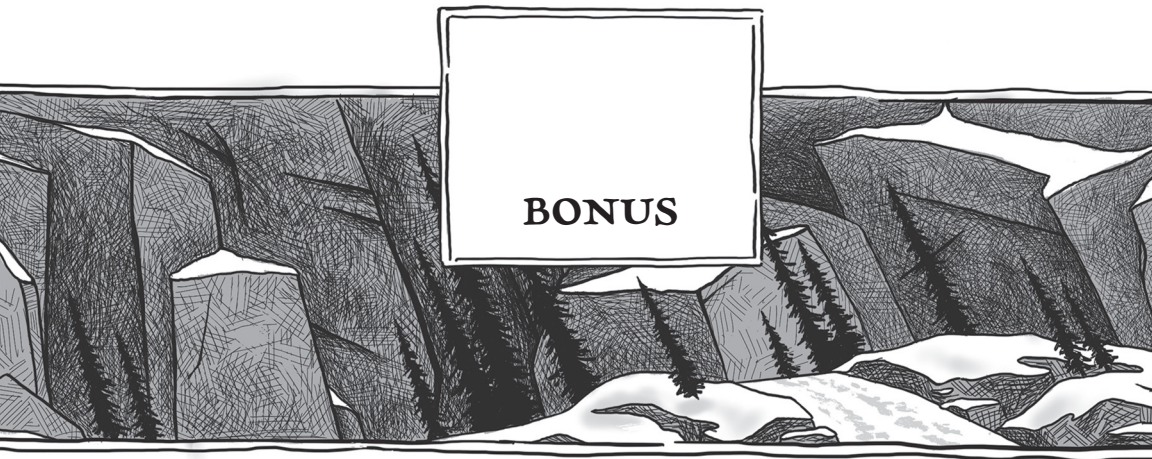
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## BONUS

### ***Soulsmith* Kickstarter Bonus Scene: Spoiler-free!**

#### **LOCATION: BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 15 OF *SOULSMITH***

Yerin smashed her master's sword into the pair of black fabric scissors.

By everything she'd learned to expect, she should have crashed right through them and into her opponent's side. But Eithan caught her blow on the scissors, pushing her blade aside delicately and slipping away.

"Now, I'm no Sword Sage," Eithan began, "but it would seem to me that you would be well served by your Ruler technique in times like this."

## WILL WIGHT

She hadn't done that before because this was just a sparring match. No way he could walk away without a scratch when the air was filled with invisible razors. But if he was the one to suggest it, who was she to turn him down?

Yerin struck the aura of her sword and its echoing cry bounced off the walls of the Transcendent Ruins. A storm of invisible blades swept out from the edges of her own weapon and from Eithan's.

She didn't understand what happened next.

Eithan casually tossed his scissors into the air and slipped to the side, into one corner of the dark stone room where they trained. Somehow, he avoided the entire Ruler technique. Not a strand of his hair or a thread of his flashy clothes was cut.

The Endless Sword knocked the scissors aside just a bit as they reached the top of their arc, causing them to tumble chaotically... back into Eithan's waiting hand.

"That is rot and nonsense," Yerin said. She slammed her sword into its sheath. "What did you just do?"

Eithan's eyebrows raised. "Do you often disarm yourself in front of an enemy?"

"If you think I'm going to let you dance off without an answer, the crack in your head is deeper than I thought."

"I am quite the dancer, if I do say so myself, but fortunately the answer is simple enough." He swept a hand out to indicate his location. "I saw where your technique was going, and I stood where it wasn't."

He smiled brightly as though his answer were complete, but Yerin wasn't going to leave it like that. "Might as well say you saw where the raindrops were going and walked between them."

## SOULSMITH

“Funny you put it like that. But really, this is a trick anyone could learn, should they have access to an unbelievably skilled teacher such as myself.” Eithan tapped the side of his eyes. “It’s merely an application of the basic aura sight we all develop at Copper and a touch of rudimentary Jade-level spiritual sense. You just need to know where to look.”

Yerin gave him a skeptical look. She had only trained with him for a few days now, while Lindon struggled in a cave of his own, but she had already learned that half of the things Eithan said were total nonsense. Or at least seemed to be.

She needed to test it herself, and luck was on her side: she had the perfect test subject.

Yerin extended her Goldsign and used the Endless Sword without warning.

This time, Eithan bounced his scissors off the far wall and spun to the side with his elbows extended like a girl playing dancer. One of his legs curled up as he spun, and when he finished, he landed with both arms extended strangely.

His scissors landed in the upper hand as though he’d pulled them there with force aura.

Once again, he was unharmed.

Yerin looked him up and down. “Did you need to do all that to dodge?”

“Pirouette.” Eithan straightened himself up and gave a beaming smile. “I was only demonstrating my qualifications as a dancer. Smooth, don’t you think? I haven’t practiced in quite a long time.”

She knew nothing about dancing and cared even less, but she thought she had caught something in his movements that time. She

## WILL WIGHT

pointed to his right shoulder. “I almost hit you up there, true? You had to dip down a touch so I didn’t catch you.”

“Well, well! I do appreciate sharp eyes in my students. I thought it would take you longer to pick up the trick. What do you think your master would say about this technique?”

Yerin answered without hesitation. “He’d say you can’t land a hit until you know how your enemy will avoid it. Gotta play two moves ahead.”

“Aim higher than *that*. But yes, as will not surprise you, your master is absolutely correct. Also, this will help you with your little...wardrobe problem.”

Following his gaze, Yerin glanced down at herself. A few sliced fragments of her outer robe drifted down.

She scowled at them. Normally, she would have shrugged them off as an insignificant cost of the Endless Sword technique, but it scraped her raw to see that she’d taken more damage from her own attacks than Eithan had.

Sounds echoed through the hallway of the Transcendent Ruins, like distant roars and what might have been a human shout.

Instantly, Yerin’s focus snapped to the door beyond which Lindon was trapped. She dashed over, sharpening her spiritual sense and slapping her palm into the stone.

“Oi! You alive in there?”

The scripts in the walls blocked spiritual perception, or maybe the walls themselves did, but she found that she could still feel *some* information. It was like trying to get a sense of what was happening in a room by peering through a crack in the wall, but that was better than nothing.

## SOULSMITH

Lindon didn't respond, but Eithan strolled after and gave her a curious look. "Surely your master put you in dangerous situations when he was training you. Is this so much worse than what he did?"

Yerin glared at him. "He tossed me to the wolves when I could handle wolves. You think he kicked me into a jungle to survive when I was a Copper? That's not training, that's a twisted game."

Her grip was tight on her sword as she said that. She couldn't tell how advanced Eithan was, or even what type of madra he used, so thorough were his veils. But he was more advanced than her, that much was stone-certain.

Advanced sacred artists didn't like being insulted to their faces.

Eithan seemed to take no notice of her disrespect, instead lazily resting a hand on the door. "Contrary to what many think of me, I do not put my students into situations they are unprepared for. But my estimation of their capabilities tends to be quite high. Higher, usually, than their own."

He removed fingertips from the stone.

At that instant, Yerin heard Lindon's muffled voice. "Yerin...is that...you?"

He was huffing and puffing like a dying pig, but she still felt her chest loosen at the sound. "You still have all your pieces?" she called back.

He made a sound that might have been a laugh. "Yes. Gratitude."

"Just checking up." She slapped the door again and looked back to Eithan. "I'd still call this cruel."

"If I thought it wouldn't be good for him, I'd pull him out. But in the meantime," Eithan snipped his scissors, "I won't let my other student begin slacking off."





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