

CHAPTER 166 - HAMMER TIME

A space was cleared out for what was quickly becoming Sam's workshop near the center of the small settlement. Tools were laid out on the slab of [Ironwood] that was being used as an impromptu table.

All of his materials and implements were gathered up from the dome and placed out here in the open air. It was much better ventilated, and the noise didn't ring quite so much when Sam began his hammering.

An unconscious dullahan was in the process of being hauled over by the other dullahans. One was stuck with just a single arm, and the other had a severe limp that would have been too debilitating for someone else to keep walking.

Sam was at the center of all the commotion going on in the settlement.

People came in, dropped off materials for him, left, and returned with more things for him. Sometimes they stayed to chat, but most of the time he was bent over some craft or another hard at work.

Not only did he need to level up his Blacksmith to create better tools for everybody else, but he also needed to repair the dullahans as well.

There was no end to the demands of the only Blacksmith in the kingdom, that seemed to go double if he was the king.

Sam wouldn't have had it any other way.

Rather than being at the center of attention because he was the king, he now had a useful role that was pivotal to the rest of their progress.

Of course, that also put an uncomfortable amount of weight onto Sam's broad shoulders.

There was no recipe booklet, nothing that said he was doing something the right way until the crafting process was completed.

After the discovery of the [Ore Boulders], those who could go out safely went out in pairs to find more ore as well as any other materials they needed for their own Professions.

Sam had created a new campfire, one that he intended to eventually be the home of the Archflame.

Activity buzzed about the settlement. Guided by Chompers, Raiko and Komachi, many more of the mandragora began arriving, re-planting themselves in long patches within the safety of the [Ironwood] walls.

Before his eyes, rows of crops popped out of the ground. [Marrowgems] and various vegetables. In short, tons of stuff to eat, though none of it was as satiating as meat.

Apparently, the mandragoras took their yield with them.

More interestingly, was that crops weren't the only thing that appeared. Crystals of various colors appeared as well. He wondered if that was a natural byproduct of growing food in a now mana-rich realm, or if that was a quirk of the mandragora.

It was even possible the crystals were produced from a Tile. If that was the case, they might not generate more crystals here.

Not unless they managed to place a [Tile] between the Sacred Tree and the Sourcestone.

Without even being asked to, Komachi collected heaps of the crystals with Chompers' assistance and brought them over to Sam.

[Water Crystal]

(Crafting Component) (F-Class)

(☆☆ Uncommon)

A small crystallized concentration of Water mana. Its stored energy has many uses in crafting and spellcasting, serving additionally as both a fuel source, catalyst and a tempering influence on Artisan Orbs. Due to its porous vessel, it slowly loses its elemental affinity over time and may revert into a Grey Crystal if not properly stored.

[Earth Crystal]

(Crafting Component) (F-Class)

(☆☆ Uncommon)

A medium-small crystallized concentration of Earth mana. Its stored energy has many uses in crafting and spellcasting, serving additionally as both a fuel source, catalyst and a tempering influence on Artisan Orbs. Due to its porous vessel, it slowly loses its elemental affinity over time and may revert into a Grey Crystal if not properly stored.

For some reason, the [Earth Crystals] were quite a bit bigger than the [Water Crystals], even though their rarity was the same, even down to the tier.

He was pretty sure the last crystal he examined prior to getting Blacksmith hadn't told him nearly as much about elemental crystals.

So earning a Profession tells me a bit more about the world, more than just what I myself can do, Sam thought.

Then again, his Insight was far higher than it had been.

Sam looked over from his table to see Raiko kneel in front of a couple of mandragoras. She held out two bunches of herba, and let the creatures pick between them.

One mandragora held a clump of deep blue herba, and the other green herba. Making jubilant cries, which fortunately didn't stun anybody in the vicinity, the pair raced off towards the Sacred Tree.

Sam rubbed his chin, wondering if the mandragora could take to ore instead of just plants. He went over, taking out a [Copper Ore] from his Inventory.

One of the creatures came over and tilted its head at the ore. It reached out and turned the chunk over and over in its leaf-like limbs.

It kept doing that for awhile.

"You alright, little dude?" Sam asked.

The mandragora seemed helplessly confused. None of the other mandragoras were even remotely interested.

Sam was about to take the [Copper Ore] back when that crystalline creature fluttered over. Upon its back were tiny bat-like wings that he hadn't seen before. It made a tinkling sound at the ore but shied back when Sam's attention fell on it.

"It's all right," he said to it, setting the ore down on the makeshift table. "If you want it, you can have it."

There was plenty more [Copper Ore] where that came from. It seemed to be far more easily found than either [Tin Ore] or [Iron Ore]. Perhaps that had something to do with the areas people were searching in.

Still, there weren't enough hands. It wasn't as easy for everyone else to break open those [Ore Boulders]. Fortunately, Komachi was able to use Rel to expedite things, as well as gain Merchant Experience too by using [Bribe] to effectively gather the resource points. So at the very least, she didn't mind, even if she wasn't sticking at Sam's side for long.

Additionally, the dullahan weren't able to go on patrols to protect the Skyshard, considering they were out of commission at the moment.

Sam guessed that the deeper you went into any of the areas on the Skyshard, the denser the mana, and as a result, the more rarity its items had.

Mana, it seemed, was the key to everything.

Steeped in high amounts of mana, even a simple [Copper Ore] would either transmogrify into something else, or vastly increase its rarity.

None of this was certain, however. Sam had his ideas based on what he'd seen and what Volquist was able—or willing—to tell him.

He couldn't help but wonder if there was a way to hook up the Mana Engine to some sort of chamber, then bombard that chamber filled with ores and materials with high-density mana.

Of course, he wouldn't dare to do it while the Black City was still chasing them. That would be suicide.

But it was an interesting thought all the same, and Sam ear-marked it for later. He would need to talk to Lenal and the professors who actually knew how the thing worked to see if it was even possible.

Knowing me, I might accidentally create a bomb and I would really prefer it if I wasn't known as the inventor of the atomic mana bomb.

Besides, Hunter didn't precisely have the same ring as Oppenheimer.

The tiny crystalline creature settled down on the tabletop and pressed its tiny paw-like hands onto the [Copper Ore]. It made a trilling crystalline chime as a faint light bloomed across the ore.

Before Sam's eyes, it began to shrink. Tiny motes of white light drifted off the ore and into the small creature's body until there was nothing left.

"A tasty snack?" Matt asked, and only then did Sam realize that he had garnered an audience.

Sam shrugged.

The little crystalline imp—that was all Sam could think of it as—hopped up and down excitedly, flew circles around Matt's head, then streaked through the sky away from the settlement.

Matt exchanged a curious glance with Sam before he broke into a run after the thing. It left a trail of glittering dust similar to a fairy in its wake.

"Dang, he just hustle you for that ore?" Komachi asked Sam.

"Maybe after it ate some, it knows how to find more of it," Sam offered. He turned back to his piles of [Demon Coins] that Matt had gathered most recently.

With each ingot smelted, he was getting better, faster, and more knowledgeable at the same time. Though he wanted to jump immediately to the most difficult thing—especially since he had a limit increase to his recipe level threshold allowing him to do just that—Sam wanted to churn through the [Demon Coins] while they still provided Experience.

What had once taken all of his attention and skill to succeed was now something he was able to do with only a mild amount of difficulty. The Artisan Orb appeared once more. Sam dumped a palmful of coins into it.

He added the Archflame's heat into the [Mobile Forge] and got to work.

It was also considerably faster with each successfully made [Bronze Ingot] to make the next one.

None of that was to say it was, by any means, *easy*. Sam had to always keep on his toes, but he enjoyed the work even if it gave diminishing returns.

The ironwood makeshift table that they had set up for Sam was true to its name. The thing would not burn easily, not even if he set a freshly glowing ingot of bronze onto it. There was a faint scorch mark, but for over a thousand degrees of heat to not immediately cause the wood to burst into flames was impressive.

Craft Success!

You create a [Bronze Ingot].

You gain Blacksmith Experience.

It was hard to not see the additional bonus to his Experience for doing something harder or unique, but the next notification that trailed after it more than made up for it.

Your [Blacksmith] Profession has reached Level 5.

+5 Strength | +5 Vigor | +5 Dexterity

+2 Awareness

You have [Blacksmith] abilities to select from.

Level Up!

Your [Voidknight] Legend has reached Level 22.

+2 to all Stats

+1 to all Talents

Sam was about to dive into his Blacksmith skills when Matt shouted beyond the walls. The crystalline creature dove between the opened gate, bearing a bundle much too large. It bobbed up and down on its tiny fluttering wings.

It fell, tumbling and bouncing end over end until it bowled over a trio of mandragora. Sam could practically hear the bowling strike sound.

Dozens of crystal-encased ore spilled out of the creature's bag. Silvery mana streamed off the ore, an intriguing sign.

Sam set down his tools and came over to get a look at what all the commotion was about. He looked at Matt, who was only now just catching up with the creature.

Puffing and wheezing, Matt arrived at a steady jog. "Damn thing is faster than I would have ever thought, even carrying such a heavy load."

"What's going on?" Sam asked both the creature and Matt, though he only expected to understand one of them.

The little crystalline imp fluttered and tinkled excitedly, like a chime shop in a windstorm, clearly excited about what it had done.

Sam looked at the strange ore, helping up the mandragoras that hadn't been able to get to their feet yet.

A leaf limb popped off at the torso.

Sam gently gave it back to the mandy in question who looked at it curiously, then at Sam. It wiggled a tiny sprout of a leaf arm.