

CHAPTER 51

After a quick breakfast, Hal decided to do a little experimentation, seeing as most of the people in Brightsong were either waking up or starting their day, he would have a good chunk of time to himself.

One of the benefits of using Vorax as a cloak, second only to the immortality side-effects of soulbinding with a Founder, was his Inventory. Hal's [Kobbiesack] was in sore need of improvement and he always meant to do something about it, but never seemed to find the time.

Vorax, as a mimic, had an almost infinite amount of space. Making sure he wouldn't eat the items was the challenging part. The rest was fairly easy, comparatively.

With his essences once more unlocked, Hal finally had the ability to Bonecraft as he used to. By combining his monster essences and his Bonecrafting skill together, Hal could draw out the essence of a creature family as pure mana and solidify it as an osseous concentration.

In other words, making monster bones out of mana.

And with his larger mana pool, he could make more complex shapes and types of bones as well.

There were four total stages to Bonecrafting: creation, refinement, imbuelement, and finalization.

Creation, as the name implied, is the general shaping and creation of "bone blanks" as Hal liked to call them. Essentially, ingots of bone waiting to be shaped. With an idea in mind as to the function or shape, the creation stage could be streamlined by making a blank in the rough shape he desired, such as a crossbow bolt, a dagger blade, or anything else he might fancy.

Once the bone blank was made, which consumed a large amount of mana, the next stage must be completed. There was no resting between stages, which made the whole process a lot more stressful than simply smelting an ingot and letting it cool while he took a break to have some tea.

It was one of the reasons that Hal required so much time in a single block to be able to Bonecraft in the first place.

Refinement was where he improved and solidified the shape and form of the item. A blade takes on an edge, a hook becomes pointier, that sort of thing. It's the last point in which the physical purpose and form of the item can be changed.

Then there were imbuelements, which granted magical essences or specific endowments and enchantments based upon the overall shape and design of the first two stages. Bonus attributes, skills, and various other improvements were all possible here based upon what items were sacrificed to apply the imbuelement.

The capacity for the item to hold various imbuelements was entirely down to its initial two stages. The higher the quality of the item and the more defined its shape, the better the imbuelements would be. Both in quantity and quality.

Finalization, as the name suggested, was the final stage of Bonecrafting and, by far, the trickiest of the lot.

The reason was pretty simple. Every single stage required a large amount of mana to get through, with the majority of the mana use being done by the first and last stages, respectively.

Mana was needed to create the bone blanks, and mana was once again needed in large quantities to seal in all the effects. The sealing process was done via layers.

As Hal bent over his project, he held it carefully between both palms as he let his mana flow one way, then the other, over the new creation.

This was more akin to applying layers of frustratingly complex lacquer. If he paused a moment, if the bone wasn't *completely* smooth or finished properly, then the mana would build up and "snag" on the parts that it couldn't flow through properly.

That resulted in a tiny, almost infinitesimal bump.

An okay result if all you're going for is a few layers of mana sealing, but the catch was the more layers Hal put on, the stronger the item became. It could even bump up the rarity and Level with enough layers, applying extra effects.

With every layer, that “tiny bump” became more and more pronounced until finally it became a large lump that threatened to destroy the whole item if Hal kept layering his mana onto it.

It was one of the main reasons he couldn't make a bone golem or a wand that held spells ready to go inside of it. He felt he *should* be able to do so, but when was anybody's guess.

The former items would take a great deal of mana, and even though he had over a 1,000 MP, it wasn't enough to do anything but make a small golem toy, if that.

He had more important creations to make.

Hal selected the Arcana monster family for this trial. They were known to have good mana retention, and he hoped that property would carry over to aether, as mana was a subset of aether.

All mana has aether, but not all aether has mana.

If he had access to Hemel's half-room where he could improve his Aetherochemistry, he would have tried to use that instead, but being that it was *on the moon*, Hal decided he'd have to settle with Bonecrafting for now.

But while he layered his mana, first one direction, then the other to apply maximum coverage with minimal overlap—a trick he learned over the last week to improve the final stage—he couldn't help but think, *why not both?*

It was a heady thought for sure, and one that would guarantee an explosive result of the item he was creating if he dropped his concentration to chase the thoughts.

There had to be a way to combine the two skills, right? Bonecrafting and Aetherochemistry were alarmingly similar in some ways, and they were both fairly unique to himself. He should be able to find a way to combine them into one skill, or at least use them in tandem with one another.

That would surely improve the results of both.

Unfortunately, the question was how?

Hal didn't have the answer, and he wondered if he ever would, but it was a tantalizing goal all the same. And until Athagan was ready to go on his little Dungeon jaunt, Hal decided to keep up with his experiments.

A faint light began to seep out of the ceramic-like box of bone he held in his hands. He could already see the issues with it, the tiny fissures too small for the human eye that he could somehow still see and feel against the odds.

Tiny lumps and bumps where his mana layering hadn't been *just right*.

In the end, however, he had once again failed to create something that was on the same level with [Magicite]. He thought he was onto something when he copied the method he used to create the [Shard of Density].

[Shard of Density II]

Rarity: Fabled

MP Storage: 0/300

Durability: 700/700

Details:

Empyrean Shardite Core II

Mana Saturated Bone

Enchantments:

[Mana Condenser II]

[Empyrean Shardite] is a known conduit of mana and magical effects. Infusing the crystalline substance into the bone matrix creates a new element. One of crystal, and bone. In the spaces between the hollowed cells of marrow, crystalline channels have grown.

These channels can not only accept mana to empower the item's effects, but can also condense that mana at a rate of 2 to 1, due to the refined nature of [Empyrean Shardite]. This mana can be extracted for use later. The unfortunate side effect is the item's weight increases dramatically.

Tier II Effects: +17% Mana Condensing

[Ossified Metal]

By combining metal and bone, you have created a new element. Ossified metal has the strength of hardened steel, but the lightness of bone. Applying this enchantment increases Damage, Durability, Lowers Weight, and makes the weapon exceptionally conductive. Conductive elemental effects are improved.

Good, but not *good enough*. More importantly, the [Shard of Density] was only slightly better than his first creation, holding 50 MP more but having a lot more durability.

Hal set down the box-shaped item and drummed his fingers along it, deep in thought. He had gotten Levels in Bonecrafting, but not enough to bring him to 35 and the next Perk, so he dismissed them, already knowing what they gave by heart.

What had he done wrong? He clearly created a better product, but it wasn't enough. With his new [Shard of Density II], he could store a base value of 300 MP and with [Mana Condenser II] he could further double that to 600. Not a small amount, but not a whole lot more than the base item he made quite a while ago, which could hold an equivalent of 250 and 500, respectively.

Granted, the Tier II effect improved that a further 17%, a 2% uplift over the original, but the only notable difference really was the durability of the second item.

It was staggeringly high compared to the original. A 700 durability versus 450 durability was nothing to sneeze at and it suggested that he had done something different that was beneficial, but not in the way he wanted.

After all, Hal was going for a strong and stable source for holding aether, not mana, but if he could work out how to do it properly with mana, he might be able to do it with aether too.

Though I'll undoubtedly need Aetherochemistry, he thought to himself. The damned stuff was in the name, for crying out loud.

Which meant he would need to either struggle with the rich aether of the Shiverglades without the buffs his little refuge on Hemel had, or risk life and limb on Hemel and get the massive buffs of the room... but have to endure the thin aether of the moon.

It was a bit of a quandary, which was why he was glad when Noth came in, followed by Hamrin.

She immediately locked eyes with him, tugged Hamrin over to him, and threw her arms around Hal as soon as he stood up to greet them.

“Hal, this is Hamrin, the Gourmage. Hamrin, this is Hal, our Founder and resident all-around defender of the realm. You two haven’t met, so I figured it was high time to change that.” She looked at what Hal was doing and the half-eaten breakfast. “I’ll get some food.”

Hamrin looked up at Hal bashfully. “Er... I’m sorry, Mister Founder, sir, I don’t really know how to—”

Hal held up a hand to stop him. “Just Hal is fine.” He motioned to the world at large. “It’s not like Brightsong is a fabulous castle or anything. I’ve got a while to go before anybody should be calling me anything other than Hal. Don’t you think?”

Hamrin pulled up a seat and folded his hands atop the table. They were clean, but his fingernails were black with crescents of dirt under the nail. He glanced at what Hal was holding, “May I?”

Hal slid the box over. It wasn’t very large, hardly big enough to be a hard case for glasses. Hal worried it would break despite the durability.

The Gourmage turned it over and over in his hands. His eyes lit up with academic fascination. “High mana density? Are you making a mana battery?”

Hal looked up curiously. “I was trying to.”

“I don’t mean to intrude,” Hamrin said, setting the [Shard of Density II] down and sliding it gingerly back to Hal. “But there are a number of failure-points I’ve noticed, and you forgot to hook up the grange-point to the Zelling-Ness node. It’s a simple fix. Where were you trained?”

Hal blinked. For a moment, his mind went blank with incomprehension. He had no idea what a grange-point was, nor a Zelling-Ness node. “I wasn’t.”

Hamrin stared at the item, then looked back at Hal in utter astonished horror. “*You made this on your own?*”