

CHAPTER 13

Over the next few days of training, Naitese was... well, not *nice*, but certainly more patient and understanding.

“You rely too much on Goldflame,” Naitese said, crouched next to his recumbent form a few days later.

They had been training almost non-stop since the Whitegold Oath was forged. Hal had to admit, Naitese and Orrittam were excellent teachers. So much so, partway through Hal began to earn training EXP. Not as much as battling monsters by a long shot, but enough to earn an entire Level. They had moved away from the initial introduction to their respective Dragonfires and were teaching him in tandem.

Naturally, that meant when it came time for the practical examination, he faced two opponents.

Groaning, Hal opened one fiery sapphire-blue eye. “Do tell.”

Orrittam, in his human form as well, helped Hal to his feet and dusted off his clothing. They had managed to pull out some dusky blue training clothes out of Orrittam’s lair.

Various shades of blue edged in gold decorated Hal’s body. He had to admit, compared to the leathers and bits of metal armor he wore, these were far more comfortable. Though, he noted, they had no defensive benefits.

Well, none aside from one: they were highly resistant to Dragonfire.

It didn’t hurt that Hal liked the way they looked, and their range of motion was second-to-none. And perhaps best of all, their Insulating rating was insane.

Best of all, because they had no armor rating of their own, they weren’t counted as wearing even Light Armor, allowing Hal to get the full enhancement of his newly acquired [Prime Draconic Armor] ability.

As it turned out, waiting so long to assign his Attributes from his Level with Oathforger was serendipitous. After he had gained another Level of

Beastborne after some grueling training, Hal finally sat down one night and went through his Oathforger Perks.

To his great surprise, his only option was no longer [Bound in Service]. He now had two more Perks to choose from. And they were very different than any other Perk he had gotten so far from Oathforger.

Bound in Service 0/1

You may, as an option, increase the number of Axioms for any Oath. By doing so, that Oath grows in strength relative to the Axiom(s) placed upon it.

Draconic Vow 0/10

Your Oath with the dragons has gone above and beyond what any mortal in living memory has managed to attain. You are at a crossroads. You may continue to enhance your bond with dragonkind, deepening your bond to the Eldest Children of the Stars, splitting your soul three ways between humanity, outsider, and dragon, or reject it entirely.

Choosing [Draconic Vow], transforms your Whitegold Oath into a Vow and a new foundation of power that you may tap into it. This Vow provides access to several Prime Spells and Abilities. More will open as you tread deeper along this path. However, it relies utterly on the foundation provided by that Vow. Should it be broken, all the abilities, spells, and powers attained therein will be destroyed. Once broken a Vow cannot be mended. Choose wisely.

[Prime Draconic Armor]

Clad yourself in the scales of your new kin. By channeling either White or Gold Dragonfire, you are able to summon scales whose hardness is based upon your Vitality and the strength of your chosen Dragonfire. [Prime Draconic Armor] is ineffective while wearing Heavy types of armor, reduced with wearing Medium types of armor, unrestricted for Light armor, and enhanced for wearing no armor.

Vow of One 0/10

Your Oath with the dragons has gone above and beyond what any mortal in living memory has managed to attain. You are at a crossroads. You may

continue to enhance your bond with dragonkind, deepening your bond to the Eldest Children of the Stars, splitting your soul three ways between humanity, outsider, and dragon, or reject it entirely.

Choosing Vow of One will keep your Whitegold Oath intact, but will draw no further power from it. Instead, your strength will be utterly your own. For each level placed into Vow of One, you will gain 10 Attribute Points to do with as you wish, and will open up new avenues to rid yourself of your outsider affliction.

Perhaps at one point he might have chosen the Vow of One.

A total of 100 Attributes given nearly free—they still cost Oathforger Perks it would seem—was a very hard thing to pass up.

But Hal could not deny the way [Draconic Vow] called to him.

Not only did it bring him a step closer to Orrittam and Naitese, but it gave him unique dragon abilities and spells—powerful Prime-type spells at that!—that would be worth far more than Attributes ever would.

Though it was a little odd that it didn't showcase what he would get in future Levels. Pretty much every other Perk showed the full breadth of what he might attain. Odd.

Besides, he was having trouble Splicing more than one essence at a time. That meant if he did get any dragon spells or abilities, he'd need to be using dragon essence the whole time.

With [Draconic Vow], Hal could use the new spells without having to Splice dragon essence. And when it came to using conflicting essences like eldritch and dragon, he could still use eldritch essence while using these spells.

It seemed like a win-win, and if the System was offering him [Vow of One], it seemed likely that it was doing so as a means of balancing out [Draconic Vow], as both were utterly new mutations of his Oathforger Perks.

That only further sealed his decision, since the first ability fit right in with his desire to be lighter and more flexible.

He needed to be fast, not sturdy. And when he eventually took a hit, the [Prime Draconic Armor] would be worth so much more than wearing heavy armor.

Not that we can get any out here in the Shiverglades, Hal mused. It's not like we have a working mine or Smithy yet. And even when we do, we'll have so many other uses for the metal that armor would be a distant thought.

Of course, Hal was ignoring the fact that he was the Founder of Brightsong and any of the dwarves would likely be happy to make him a heavy suit of armor. Even if it cost a hefty delay in raising buildings that they desperately needed *last week*.

Recalcitrantly acknowledging this, Hal thought, *maybe something ceremonial that looks nice then.*

Once selected, Hal wasted no time in cladding his entire right arm in golden scales that rippled across his skin like Midas' curse. They shone and shimmered like polished hexagonal coins.

Taking out a dagger, Hal gently pressed the blade against the scales. When they didn't break, he pressed harder, then harder still. It took him using [Convergence] to bolster his Strength before the scales began to crack and he felt the first twinge of pain.

Impressive.

And that was with his Goldflame at Copper and his Vitality at 45 base. Not bad at all when combined with lighter armor.

For his Attributes, Hal tossed every last point into Charisma for the time being. He had a short bout of indecision when he saw he had exactly the right number of points to push his Mind from 85 to 100, but thought better of it.

Lately, though he still used a crazy amount of MP for his spells, he was using more and more Spirit. Which, much to his dismay, didn't seem to want to give any sort of numerical quantifier. He had to go entirely by intuition and feel which... well, wasn't that great truthfully.

But it also meant that MND didn't affect him quite so much as when he used MP. And considering that [Prime Draconic Armor] used Spirit instead of Mana, that was just another reason to take a bit of a breather from pumping one Attribute ridiculously high.

He still had several that were below 20 still.

[STATUS]

Hal Williams

Level: 57

Discordant Stone: 18,400 /55,000

Strain: 0/100

Wyrd: 0/100

BP: 31/35

Classes

Beastborne: 33

Oathforger: 14

Novice: 10

Resources

HP: 800 (+75)

SP: 650

MP: 1,040 (+75)

Attributes

STR: 15

VIT: 45

DEX: 15

AGI: 15

INT: 52 (+8)

MND: 85 (+8)

CHR: 65 (+23)

Regeneration

HP/hr: 121.8

SP/hr: 89.0

MP/hr: 296.6

While he was still fairly dissatisfied with his growth as of late, Hal had to admit that things were definitely shaping up. He had crossed the 1,000 MP threshold solidly now and without any use of items or equipment.

Though perhaps the most interesting aspect of all was that the Attribute bonuses from [Fetter] still applied to him, even though he was not currently wielding the sword. Maybe so long as it remained bound to him and he didn't replace it, it still provided its magical bonuses?

The rest of his Fourth attire and the lovingly crafted [Fourth Mantle +1], had since been destroyed when he bathed in Dragonfire without realizing that he should have taken his armor off first.

Somehow his rings and [Fetter] survived. Small miracles.

More to the point, his MP regeneration was enough that in a handful of hours he would fully recover all of his massive MP which bode well for not only battle but Bonecrafting as well which tended to drain him dry.

Bringing himself back to the present, Hal looked around the churned up clearing the dragons had made just for this purpose. Each day they, along with Hal, were turning this tract of stunted forest into a training arena.

Orrittam and Naitese would fly in huge boulders, and then under the guise of training Hal, would enlist his help in carving them into blocks to be used as flooring.

I sure hope we don't have some World Martial Arts Tournament here, Hal thought wryly.

Using Dragonfire to breathe a tidal wave of kinetic force was one thing, but learning to tighten it to a beam the width of floss with an edge that made even the sharpest scalpel seem dull was on an entirely different level.

There was one thing that Hal could say of the dragons: they never gave him time to get used to feeling strong or masterful.

As soon as he barely became proficient with one facet of Dragonfire, they pushed him forward again, so he felt like his progress was a constant shambling stumble.

After the first near-miss with Dragonfire running rampant in the Manatree Glade, Hal had refused to train there again. Not until he was more capable of controlling his newfound power.

Putting a hand to his lower back where Orrittam had snuck in a sharp blow to his kidneys, Hal grunted again as he stretched.

“The more you get used to using Dragonfire,” Orrittam explained, “the more you rely upon Goldflame to the almost total exception of Whiteflame. You are, and forgive me for saying so, becoming quite predictable.”

Hal rolled his eyes. “Need I remind you, there are *two* of you.”

“You did it before,” Naitese said with a smug mocking grin. There was surprisingly little vitriol in her words. Hal was almost as surprised in her steady shift in demeanor as he was with Orrittam’s sucker punch that had lined him up perfectly for Naitese’s onslaught.

“Ha ha,” Hal said stoically. “Though I can’t deny that the Training Experience and gains to my core have been tremendous. Even when I lose, I still get a hefty amount.” He rubbed his back and winced at the sharp sting. “Would be nice if I didn’t get the *shirt* kicked out of me all the time though.”

Orrittam boomed a jovial laugh and slapped him on the back. “It is all part of the training, Hal! I assure you, you are doing wonderfully. A few more years and we’ll make a dragon out of you yet!”

Naitese snorted. “Provided he only fights dragons that have adopted a human form, perhaps.”

“Now, now, dear daughter, fair is fair.”

The younger dragon shrugged her pale shoulders. Unlike Hal’s garb, the pair preferred to deck themselves out in robes that resembled silken kimonos.

Naitese’s was bare on her left shoulder, while Orrittam’s was bared to his chest at an angle. Hal had no idea what the significance of that was, but considering Orrittam was much stronger than his daughter, perhaps it had to do with a show of strength.

While both had one arm unburdened, Orrittam had half of his chest exposed while Naitese only had the one shoulder bare. It wasn’t as if Naitese

thought nudity was an issue, she regularly would change clothes without any regard for what either Hal or Noth said on the matter.

But when Hal brought this up, wondering aloud whether an exceptionally powerful dragon would fight nearly nude to showcase his prowess, the dragons merely laughed as if he had made a grand joke.

Since that was one of the first times Hal had remembered making Naitese laugh without making himself the butt of the joke, Hal decided to leave it at that for now.

The fashion sense of dragons could remain a mystery a while longer.