

CHAPTER 54

It didn't take long for everything to get set up.

Hal and Hamrin had collected a few onlookers who were interested in what they were doing and were watching the two with curiosity. Above the first field was a net Hal had created that would carry and drip mana down like a gentle rain onto the plowed fields below.

Hamrin had already whipped up a small supply of seeds and the workers assigned to this farm had done an excellent job getting everything ready in such a short time.

Hal gripped one end of the mimic wire he created and looked over at Hamrin. "Moment of truth."

He sent a trickle of his recovering mana into the wire and watched as a faint blue glow surrounded it. As it reached the tiny holes Hal had evenly spaced along the wire, tiny droplets of mana leaked out and fell to the planted rows of crops below.

It took around 300 MP to fully saturate the net of this field, but that accounted for filling the wire as well. Once the wire was saturated, it was a steady, slow drip. Whenever the wire was over-saturated, Hal could feel pressure build up in his palm where he was funneling his mana.

If he didn't push too hard, the mana stayed within the confines of his own body until the wire could accept more.

"It works!" Hamrin whooped and practically jumped with joy. "I can't believe it works on the first try. This is just a prototype!"

Hal grinned to himself, pleased at the result. Because, before their very eyes, tiny green shoots were creeping up through the dark soil. "That was fast."

"I told you," Hamrin said proudly. "These are some of my pride and joys."

"You brought these seeds from elsewhere?" Hal asked.

“Of course. I always have a few seed packets on me wherever I go, you never know when you’ll need them.”

Hal stared at the man for a long moment. “You are a curious one, Hamrin, but I’m glad you’re here all the same.”

“Me too.”

The rest of the day was spent working on improvements to the netting. Getting a more stable drip system set up was paramount. It didn’t take long for them to start noticing patches where the mana collected more heavily and those where it was thin.

By the next day, the majority of the crops in the field were ready to harvest. Hal couldn’t believe his eyes. A young man was carting a rather rough-and-tumble version of a wheelbarrow between rows of... Hal didn’t know what they were.

“[Levicabbage],” Hamrin told him. “Levitates once it’s ripe. See that knotty looking string? That’s all that’s holding it still. I already told the farmers what to do. Just watch.”

Round orbs of veiny red cabbage, like the oddest field of balloons Hal ever saw, were swaying in the gentle yet freezing cold air. The farmer simply reached out with a pair of shears to snip them one by one. Freed of their root, they stopped levitating completely and fell into the farmer’s hand.

One by one the roots were snipped, and the plants harvested with a minimal amount of effort.

“They’re far more nutritious than your typical cabbage, which in itself is full of—”

“Do you have more?” Hal asked. He wasn’t a fan of cabbage, but if they could grow more than half a field of the stuff in a *day*, that was nothing short of a florking miracle.

“Tons, but there’s also other vegetables and fruits I would like to try out. However, I am concerned about the monsters. There is a large amount of mana we put into the field, and even if you’re very careful, there’s only so much—ah, there it is.”

Hal saw it too.

The ground began to bulge and writhe as a green creature, a mass of roots and leaves reminiscent of a venus flytrap, broke through the surface in a spray of earth.

Raising his hand, Hal cast *Anvil Lightning* on the thing before the farmer knew what was going on. There was a thunderous *CRACK* as the bolt of concussive force hit the creature and then the field was raining burning leaves and plant viscera with a wet slapping sound.

You defeat the [Aberrant Plant / Lv.8]

You gain 300 Experience Points.

You earn 30 Sparks.

Hal's eyebrow rose at that. It wasn't much EXP, but it was sure as hell better than risking your life out in the wilds. Especially for the people who were just starting out, 300 Experience was generous.

Granted, he was a lot stronger than the monster, but anybody in Brightsong should have no problem dispatching a monster like that.

No monster essences though, maybe it was just an unlucky kill or maybe he couldn't get any essences from it?

Needs more testing.

"Wait!" Hamrin said, putting his hands on the fence around the field and leaning in. "Look at the stunted plants, Hal."

Fingers still tingling from the spell, Hal followed Hamrin's gaze and there he saw what Hamrin was so excited about. Where the monster's corpse had rained down and melted into the ground, the crops were growing at a remarkable rate.

The shoots that had been there this morning were forming layer after layer of red leaves. It was astounding and seemed, to Hal, even better than the mana net they had created.

And it gave Hal an idea, one he had thought of putting away for later but now was rethinking his decision. "Hamrin," he said slowly, thoughts spinning, "have you ever experimented with the monster farms you accidentally created?"

"Oh no," Hamrin told him severely. "It's much too dangerous. We always cull the monsters and destroy the fields. Of course, the fields aren't

actually outside, but in small rooms in the Tower, you see. So any monsters are usually quite easily spotted and their effect kept minimal.”

Hal gestured to two adventurers wearing the red insignia of the Royal Knights headed by Durvin and Ashera.

“Sir?” one of them asked as they approached.

“I’d like the both of you to patrol this field today, if you would be so kind and keep the farmers safe. There will be more monsters. Kill them but don’t touch their bodies.”

An odd look passed between the two, but they hopped over the fence with alacrity and did as Hal asked.

“You think there will be more?” Hamrin asked. Then he saw Hal gripping the lead of the mana net. “Oh. You’re going to make more.”

“Yup. We might be going about this all wrong, Hamrin.”

This time it only took an hour with Hal supercharging the wire, thanks to having a full tank of MP, for another set of monsters to appear. Unsurprisingly, these were in the same mana-rich areas that they had been previously working to get rid of.

The Royal Knights-in-training rushed to the scene and dispatched it with all the prejudice you would expect of a unit of adventurers charged with protecting Brightsong, but usually unable to do much fighting.

Hal grinned to himself as not only did the two fighters gain Experience from their efforts, the cabbages that grew around the death of the monsters were nearly double the size of the previously harvested crop.

Letting the wire drop, Hal turned to Hamrin while requesting one of the watching dwarves to channel as much mana into that wire as dwarvenly possible.

“Then I get to whack a plant too, aye?” he asked hopefully.

“If you like,” Hal told him. “But tell the guards that I said so, okay?”

“Aye!”

Hamrin hurried up to Hal as he walked back to his cottage at a fast clip. Vorax sniffed the air, having scented monsters in his normally peaceful little

home. Sensing none that were alive besides Hal and Vorax, the mimic cloak went back to sleep.

“What are you thinking, Hal?”

“I’m thinking that we’ve got it backwards,” Hal said, pushing open the door to the cottage and sitting back at the workbench he had nestled in the corner. It was a rough assembly of planks and timber nobody needed, and was a large enough surface that he could do most of his Bonecrafting on without getting in the way.

The cottage itself was cozy, not large, but not small either. However, with a tiny kitchen, an area that could generously be called a living room beside the fireplace, and the bedroom—which was more like a corner of the room with a bed—there wasn’t much room for anything else.

It was bigger than his studio back in Seattle and had far fewer spiders. He really hoped there wasn’t a spider season in the Shiverglades.

The addition of the workbench didn’t sit well with Noth, but she tolerated it and he saw that she had set some of her potion bottles from her Alchemy work there.

Making sure not to bother any of her things, Hal set to work again. But this time, he didn’t bother to make a net. He created a large bone blank of mimic essence in the shape of a beam roughly an inch to a side.

“Given the size of the field and the issues with production,” Hal said as he worked, “we used something like 200 to 400 mana just to get the crops enhanced, right?”

“More than I figured, but the results speak for themselves,” Hamrin said, leaning against the wall and watching with the same look of fascination whenever Hal did Bonecrafting around him. “Even in my experiments, the crops never grew *that* fast.”

“Yes, but the monsters appeared in an hour or two of high saturation, maybe 200 MP. That means, for the same amount of time and even less mana, we can create *more* crops, while also generating monsters to slay.”

Hamrin frowned. “But monsters—Oh. Huh.”

“If we can concentrate the mana to a few locations, spread out enough that they don’t overlap too much, then we should be able to predict where the monsters will spawn, right?”

With the bone blank in front of him, Hal began the second stage and shaped it into a long pole with a spiked bottom to make it easier to drive into the cold, hard dirt.

Hal looked up at him. “The Shiverglades are deadly. Only the most experienced among us can go out safely and even then, it’s a risk. But this? This gets us food, and grants Experience to those working there besides the farmers. The big ‘if’ is whether or not we can reliably put the monsters where we want them.”

“If we have somebody patrolling, wouldn’t that be enough?”

“No, because soon enough, we’ll have multiple fields to cover. We want the monsters somewhere we can control. Hunting across the fields doesn’t seem like a great use of time. Granted, I could be wrong. But if we send a strong surge of mana into the immediate area with these spikes, we should be able to bind the monsters’ spawn location, as it were.”

Hamrin looked at the spike, then Hal thoughtfully. “That’s... not something I would have ever thought of. Farmers are not strong usually and fighting monsters seems like a risk they wouldn’t wish to take.”

“Normally quite true, but even a farmer should want to get some Experience and Levels, right? Not everybody can pick up a sword and be an adventurer, going off to far-flung places. So what if we can offer Levels, Experience, and [Sparks] to people who aren’t adventurers? People who don’t want to go out into the wilds to kill things and risk getting killed in turn.”

“How will we do that? You saw that monster. It was Level 8.”

Hal glanced at him. “You saw it’s Level?”

“It’s a Tower trait most of us learn, lets us see monster Levels so we can better pick our targets.” Hamrin scuffed his shoe on the floorboards. “Those of us who were lucky enough to have an affinity for combat magic, that is.”

“You’re going to help us make something much better than anything the Tower ever dreamed of, Hamrin. And all because you *don’t* have an affinity for combat magic. Remember that.”