

Chapter 38

Hal plunged through the miasma-strewn cavern, using golem and frost gigant essence to make himself as immovable and heavy as possible. With his grip reversed on his blade, he dropped like a javelin bolt onto the misshapen head of the frost gigant.

The creature had skin as white and hard as diamonds, sparkling with such cold that touching it with his bare skin had caused dark burns to appear.

Wrapped up in Vorax's protective cloak as he was, Hal's sword impaled itself into the crown of the gigant's head.

Frost, white and fluffy like an old freezer in deep need of defrosting, crept up [Founder's Folly] and forced Hal to leap before being turned into a human popsicle himself.

You defeat the [Frost Gigant / Lv.66]

You gain 12,000 Experience Points.

You earn 12,000 Sparks.

You gain Frost Gigant Essence (Beastmen).

You learn Ice Roar.

You obtain:

(1) [Frost Gigant Heart]

(3) [Hoarfrost Lumber]

(1) [Greater Monster Core]

Beastborne reaches Level 40.

You have 5 attribute points awaiting distribution.

You have 1 Beastborne Perk point awaiting assignment.

Hal sprinted to the side, grabbing hold of Robas as he hurried to move out of the way on the ice-strewn floor. His every footfall cracked the icy flooring, leaving depressions in his wake.

They managed to clear out just in time for the gigant's 30-foot-tall body to crash to the ground and shatter into a million shards of glittering ice.

"My thanks," Robas said, picking his way through the shifting jagged chunks of ice until he was up on a solid shelf of compacted snow with the others.

Val jumped and punched the air with a holler and whoop. "Yeah! That was great, Hal. How did you fall so fast? What essence was that?"

Hal grinned and told her.

The battles of the third floor had been against large monsters who needed a team to figure out their attack patterns. Hal and Val's *Spoil Shield* had come in handy several times.

Many of the monsters here had single elemental or schools of spells, which made it relatively easy for the Beastbornes to shield themselves and their allies with *Spoil Shield*.

And now, they had gained a new spell. Hal's second of the third floor, and thankfully *not* another blighted essence spell.

This was from the gigant, an increasingly common enemy found within the Tower. Several had familiars that aided them in combat, others worked as part of a small group.

Gigants were big, slow, and dumb, but they made up for all of that with unparalleled ferocity. They looked like somebody crossed a

house with a linebacker, all muscle and size, with a freakish lipless grimace.

Their magical abilities were not to be scoffed at, as Val had learned when she took a spell called *Lightning Blast* straight to the chest and flew across the room.

She survived, but they didn't learn the spell. In fact, Hal was pretty sure that they would need to spend a lot more time fighting gigants before learning a spell.

Not so.

You learn Ice Roar.

Ice Roar

Fill the world with a sonorous roar that changes the arena and immediate surroundings to ice element. The ground becomes covered in ice that ensnares and damages anybody who stands still for too long. You and any you choose are immune to these effects. While within your icy domain, you gain increased magic damage, magic defense, and speed.

School: Beast Magic

Type: Magical (Ice)

Family: Beastmen (Gigant)

MP: Variable

BP: 7

Strain: 22

Ice Roar was what made this battle so difficult. Though the gigant had been able to do more than simply cause the frozen ground to snare them to the spot with a *Frostbite* damage-over-time effect.

The giant creature had been able to cause chunks of the ceiling to rain down upon them as well, making it even more difficult to move around.

I guess that's probably more to do with physics than the actual spell, Hal thought to himself.

He would have liked to have a spell that could literally bring the roof down.

“Do you have the BP to spare?” Val asked.

“Not even close,” Hal admitted. Then he remembered he had Leveled Up. “Hold on, maybe.” He joined her on the little shelf where Elaise had a roaring fire going to banish the chill of the room.

Even Giel was wrapped up in a blanket and shivering, icicles falling from his hair and horns.

“I finally got more Burden Points,” Hal said, then his face fell. “A total of five.”

“How many does that put you at?” Val asked.

“My Level and BP are now the same: 40.” He grumbled aloud.

“That puts me a single point off from being able to use *Ice Roar*.”

“Count yourself lucky,” Val said. My Beastborne is only just now hitting 31. I’m still at 30 BP.”

Hal frowned. He distinctly recalled having more BP than that at Level 30 Beastborne.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Hal said, wondering what the difference was. By this time, she should also have a Class Path, but she hadn’t mentioned one either.

Strange. Hal had managed a Class Path even when his Beastborne was still broken without a Monster Core.

Unlike the previous Levels, Hal put all 5 attribute points into Mind. He was using his mana like crazy, and every point mattered now that they were coming across more of those fire marked doors that signified a large and generally difficult fight.

It was almost as if the Tower was learning about them with each room they entered, intentionally making it as difficult as possible for their setup. Hal hoped that wasn't the case, but he generally wasn't that lucky.

When it became clear that Hal's magic was amplified beyond what should be possible, the Tower kept spitting out magic-resistant creatures that forced Hal to rely on his new Beastblade Skill to do anything remotely close to his old damage.

Val, without much skill in her weapon of choice, was even more hard pressed to contribute to the battles. It was often up to her to distract the creature while Hal, Giel, and Elaise did much of the heavy lifting.

Elaise's magic was potent, but it was nothing compared to her new greatsword that could cut through even the diamond hard hide of a frost giant.

However, even the Ninja needed help, and Hal was happy to provide it. With [Founder's Folly], he could extend the blade like a whip and latch onto the craggy surfaces of the cavern, swinging around like a low-budget Spider-man.

The added maneuverability clearly helped when it came to fighting large monsters like the frost giant.

As they took their nightly meal, or what felt like night, since time didn't seem to flow as fast in the Tower, Hal looked through his spells to see what he could get rid of to make room for *Ice Roar*.

He just needed a single point, which meant he would ideally be looking at his weaker spells, since they often cost the least BP to set.

Bomb Toss only cost a single BP, but it was so versatile that he was unwilling to get rid of it. *Blinding Spit*, however, now that was pretty useless here.

He had used it once, maybe twice, but Elaise and Val were far better than him at getting a monster's attention. Most of the time, it was Hal's role to blindside the creature with as much overwhelming force as possible.

That meant he didn't need to always be the center of a monster's attention.

Pulling out *Blinding Spit* gave Hal 2 BP back so that even after he set *Ice Roar*, he was only at 39/40 BP.

[STATUS]

Hal Williams

Level: 78

Discordant Stone: 8,000/55,000

Strain: 0/100

Wyrd: 0/100

BP: 39/40

Classes

Novice: 10

Beastborne: 40

Oathforger: 14

Osseochemist: 14

Resources

HP: 1,375 (+75)

SP: 965

MP: 2,840 (+75)

Attributes

STR: 20

VIT: 80 (+38)

DEX: 20

AGI: 20 (+16)

INT: 82 (+11)

MND: 105 (+22)

CHR: 70 (+36)

Hal was fairly pleased with MND being his highest stat. At least, for now. He still needed to bring some others up to the 100 stat threshold to gain new traits, but that could wait. For now, he desperately needed more MND.

Resting, camping, eating, and drinking well-crafted goods tended to raise his resources' recovery rate and maximums. By raising his base maximum MP with increasing amounts of MND, Hal was able to get even more out of each stat point.

More importantly, Level 40 Beastborne provided him with another Perk point. Hal already knew what he was going to pick: another Level of *Essence Counter+*, which would give him his first MP cost reduction for properly using the Predator/Prey relationship with Beast Magic spells.

Essence Counter+ (2/5)

Prerequisites: Fell Magic Lv.1, Essence Delve Lv.1

Increases the potency of Essence Counters, dealing increased damage when utilizing the Predator/Prey relationship appropriately.

Lv.1: +15% Damage.

Lv.2: +20% Damage. -2% Mana Cost.

Not to mention, Hal also received a [Greater Monster Core], putting him at eight out of ten he needed for Val's Fusion Quest.

Something he still hadn't told her about. He kept promising himself that he would let her know as soon as the time was right, but he always chickened out at the last moment.

Instead, he had asked everybody there to save any cores they found off the monsters they were facing. Nobody had much problem with that. Aside from Alchemists, few people could make use of monster cores, so they tended to be junk items unless you were close to a city.

Those in present company, especially Elaise and Robas, were used to his odd ingredient requests for bonecrafting.

Like most alchemical ingredients, the moment monster cores were collected they began to lose their potency. Carrying a monster core, even a greater variety, would lose about 10% of its potency an hour until it was just a hollow shell.

Thankfully, Hal's Fusion Quest didn't mention anything about the purity of a core. If that was a requirement, he wasn't sure how to get over that hurdle.

Hopefully, that won't be a problem, Hal thought to himself, belatedly realizing he might be jinxing it. Then he brushed that concern aside. There were more important things to worry about.

Like exhaustion stacks. Despite taking breaks, he had been fighting for a while. Over time, that built up fatigue which eventually turned into *Exhaustion*.

Even before going into the Tower, he had been working through a crafting frenzy, getting little sleep.

Hopefully nobody would run into the *Exhaustion* debuff anytime soon. The effects of that were harsh, and potentially devastating in battle. Typically, *Exhaustion* happened from insufficient insulation, but it could occur from dehydration and sleep deprivation too.

He heard it could happen from certain spells, toxins, and abilities as well.

Even incurring one level of *Exhaustion* was incredibly detrimental. It entirely halted HP, MP and SP regeneration, which his entire group was completely reliant on. And the more *Exhaustion* built up, the worse it got.

Once they were rested and back to full fighting force, Hal stood up. Only when it took several seconds for the next person to rise did he realize just how tired they were.

How many days have we been going without much more than a few short naps? Hal couldn't remember the last time he slept. Their days were full of traps, fighting, more traps, and various puzzles that tried their patience as well as their wits.

If Hal saw another puzzle with colored orbs, he thought he might scream.

Even Val, for all her vast reserves and love for fighting, looked like she was about to pass out.

“Why don’t we see what rooms are up next? If it doesn’t look like anything good, we’ll rest here for a spell.”

Nobody argued. Elaise and Val accompanied him to the door.

As usual, there were two options.

The door on the left was scarred and pitted, its marking completely illegible. While the door on the right held the familiar flame sigil.

“Mystery door or another fight,” Val muttered to herself. For as much as she had enjoyed learning a new spell, she now looked like she wanted anything but another fight.

Hal couldn’t blame her. Leveling no longer granted him replenished HP. He was running on fumes, even though his HP was more than three-quarters full and his SP about half.

Taking a vial of [Coffee] out of his inventory, Hal uncorked the potion bottle and took a swig of the dark magical elixir.

He passed around more of the potion to anybody who wanted it. The coffee was perfectly hot within the insulting elder glass bottles, and it tasted as if it had just been brewed.

However, its effects were blunted with repeated use. Hal was having to dose himself nearly every other room just to stay on his feet, and his once vast supply was running dangerously low.

He didn’t want to think what would have happened if Hermes hadn’t come along through mysterious means. The [Coffee] had become instrumental to their survival.

“All right then,” Hal said, “We’ll take a longer break before we decide what to do.”

Val squinted at the door. It looked as if somebody had tossed a bucket of acid on it. She reached forward, scratching at a piece of the warped and melted sigil.

“No, wait!” Hal reached out, but it was too late.

As soon as Val touched the door with her finger, it shattered. The broken door led into a room of darkness that pulled them in like the world’s largest vacuum cleaner.