

**New Ideas**  
**Friday – 12.1.62**

AS SOON AS MY SKELETON'S BODY BLOCKED THE INCOMING Styires I rushed forward, war scythe in hand. While a little cliché for a Necromancer, I chose the war scythe because it was a relatively simple polearm that was more useful for me than a spear would be. Unlike an old-time farmer's scythe, the war scythe had its curved blade mounted at the end of the pole. This meant there was no need for awkward angles to attack with in order to hit your opponent with a blade.

To the point, I moved to the side of my line of skeletons and chopped downward. The Styire attempted to twist out of the way; however, the blade chopped straight through its shoulder, cleanly cleaving off its arm and not even slowing down.

At that exact moment I felt a minor notification enter my mind. Smiling, I stepped back and my companions and minions tore through the remaining Styires in seconds. All of us were well outside of the "recommended" anything for the Scrag.

As soon as the fighting was done I pulled up the notification, followed almost immediately by the spell list.

*< You have learned the spell Bone-Forge(war scythe)  
Polearms (Bone-Forged) IV has become Polearms (Bone-  
Forged) V >*

< *Bone-Forged(war scythe)*: Crafts a bone-forged war scythe designed for use by the Necromancer rather than their minions. The weapon is infused with energy from the Valley of Dust, depositing a powerful spirit poison into its victims.

*Effects*: Creates a bone-forged war scythe containing a dangerous poison that can affect anything containing a spirit.

*Necromantic | Bone | Poison | Spirit | Golem Creation >*

“Did it work this time?” Kelly asked, clearly interested.

“Yep,” I answered while looking at the information.

“Apparently the ability to sever limbs isn’t worthy of mention. My attempts to apply a poison worked quite well, however.”

Another check with my status page showed that my weapon required as much maintenance as a standard skeleton. On the other hand, it was a backup weapon that stood well above Toxic Breath in damage potential; the Styire had stopped moving with the severing of its arm. Could have just been the shock of losing an arm, or the effects of a “spirit poison” on a monster already severely wounded, but I took no chances and had one of my skeletons chop its head off anyways.

“Excellent. Makes sense as well, given that it’s a close-quarters spell, effectively. You going to give your skeletons polearms?” Zak asked, clearly interested.

“Maybe. I’ve been thinking about making a couple more powerful skeletons as my numbers increase. I’ll

probably give them something more dangerous. So it's a possibility," I said.

They nodded. George smiled and glanced upward. I followed suit but couldn't see the drone I was looking for. Kelly's friend was our client today, and he wanted to go to the plains. Since I wasn't hiring him to hack into the guild, he was willing to pay for this trip.

Necromancer with a melee weapon was obvious, even ignoring the fact that I also had skeletons. Kelly, though she hadn't showed it yet, had developed a magic-like ability for her class. And Zak was a rare kind of spellcaster, at least rare in combat situations. He was a Light Bender. Normally more of a surveillance type spellcaster, he used his Light Bender spells to achieve attacks by mixing in fire magic. Fire runes were only used, to my knowledge, in enchantment, but apparently Zak had figured out how to combine them with light to create offensive spells.

The drone used by George was going to capture footage of our fights to compliment his official job as a student of dungeon dynamics, a new branch of study that focused on improving our ability to control and contain these things.

The rest of the trip to the edge of the Scraggs didn't involve me using my new weapon. Not surprising at all, as it was really overpowered for Styires. But my second, and much older, spell project worked out. Fortunately, in this Zak came to my rescue.

Auras were types of spells that affected everything around them, and Zak had some light runes he used to make it work. While those runes didn't work for me on this, they did inspire me to seek out new runes in the contact and poison families to get the same job done. And while we were eating lunch today I'd found some that might work. Of course, it would take a few hours of work

to adapt my rudimentary spells to handle the new runes. And a knot. I didn't like it, but I had to develop a knot for the flexibility of being able to target things.

After lunch we headed to the cliff dividing the Scraggs and the plains. Standing on the edge, it was clear just how unbelievably huge this dungeon was. The plains spread out before us, small patches of trees scattered throughout, reaching far and away toward the forest. Most people in Columbia, even if they'd never set foot in the dungeon, knew you didn't enter the shade of the trees. It was a trap, as the trees themselves were monsters. Despite this, there was a clear line where the forest began, a dozen kilometers away. There were many cities that could fit inside the area we were looking out over.

The forest itself wasn't made completely of monster trees, but they were in there, making them much more dangerous just from that fact alone. The forest was also one of the most dangerous places in the entire dungeon based solely on the normal monsters, at least before you started fighting whatever monsters lived in the sea.

Despite the ease at which we had made it to the cliff, there was much to do before we could head down onto the plains. First we had to find a way down. Leaning a bit over the edge, we looked left and right, but no obvious paths were visible. This wasn't that surprising, there weren't many and they moved around in an apparently random fashion. How the dungeon achieved this, moving solid paths, even when people camped on them, had never been determined. Only one of the massive number of questions people had about what was going on.

Path or no path, a huge flock of Cliff Huggers let go of the cliff and began climbing to our level. My quick count had around thirteen monsters, though I had only

minimum confidence. They were moving too much for me to be certain of their numbers.

“Well, time to put our ranged abilities to the test,” Zak said calmly.

I ordered my four ranged skeletons to let off at the circling monsters as they climbed, far too fast for my liking. Unfortunately, single-shot rifles weren't the best at hitting distant moving targets, especially those with the speed of the Huggers. My skeletons weren't especially accurate either, though I'd been improving that. We still managed to land some blows, though they only hit the monsters' wings, and the leather wings seemed able to continue to function with minor damage.

Zak fired off a beam of light and fire which missed initially, but he was able to sweep onto his target. The Cliff Hugger dived quickly to get out of the beam but was clearly injured. Unfortunately, the beam didn't stay in contact long enough for a kill.

We pulled back from the cliff edge as the monsters gained height. I set up my defensive line of eight skeletons, and everyone got ready for the fight behind the line. Except Kelly, who moved in front.

I dropped my scythe at my feet, I needed both hands for anti-air fire, Poison Bomb in one hand and spell detonator in the other. Hopefully there wouldn't be enough Huggers that I would need the scythe. I should probably make a strap for the scythe so I could have it close at hand while I used both of mine. Next time I guess.

I stopped contemplating things as the Huggers reach the top of their flight and started diving toward us. None of them were dead yet, but five were heavily damaged and lagging behind. Zak appeared to be going for spreading

the injury around, because every Hugger had a least one burn mark.

The Huggers appeared to reach the top. We hadn't killed any of them, but five were heavily damaged and lagging behind the flock and about half of the others were also injured, though not so bad off.

Then the flock dove toward us. Zak used the much more predictable path to plant a fiery beam into the face of one of the more whole-looking ones, killing it almost instantly. I launched my Poison Bomb, detonating it right in the path of the largest concentration of Cliff Huggers. To my great surprise, the two that tried to dive under the bomb didn't go low enough, allowing the poison to float down into their faces.

Kelly stepped a little closer to my skeletons, making room for my Poison Bomb combo. Which I happily took care off, as I think I had underestimated the number of Cliff Huggers.

Three of the creatures died as they dived toward us, but the swarm didn't appear to be any smaller. Then Kelly suddenly crouched and launched herself fifteen feet into the air, right in front of the swarm. I almost hit her in the back with a Poison Bomb, having not expected that move at all.

Both arms were held next to her waist and she punched them forward, opening her palms as if to strike with them. Instead, a pair colorless shockwaves rippled out from her hands. The injured Huggers suddenly twitched. Those with bad enough injuries dropped to the ground directly, and the rest simply twitched, losing altitude and speed.

With six injured Huggers on the ground around her, Kelly set to work ending them while the rest continued to

my shield line. A quick head count had nine more headed for me, so I launched a pair of Miasma Bombs right in front of the wall of skeletons just as another Hugger was taken out by Zak. He then summoned glowing swords, which floated forward to meet the monsters as they slammed into my line of skeletons.

Nine levels of reinforcement had hardened my line against such monsters, and the skeletons simply pushed back.

Zak's glowing weapons started attacking the Huggers as well, they were surprisingly effective but apparently lacked the ability to target anything but center of mass. The Cliff Huggers didn't last long, however. Without the advantage of their flight and distance they were really very weak, and my skeletons were able to chop through them with ease. Even the few Cliff Huggers that managed to hold onto a shield couldn't do much, as I'd finally managed to attach helmets to my skeletons. This made such weak attacks against the skeletons pointless.

By the time Kelly had killed off her injured Huggers, me and Zak had managed the remaining. The whole thing didn't take all that long. I used this moment to replace my war scythe with one having a strap. Such a device was relatively easy to add, though it took a little experimenting to get the positioning comfortable over my shoulder.

"Ok, what the hell was that, Kelly?" Zak asked while I was working on my scythe. He sounded a little bewildered.

"That was a pain wave, it increases the feelings of pain and fatigue in those impacted. Of course, I unleashed two in order to hit everything," Kelly answered.

I smiled. "Can you show us? At close range, I mean, I want to see if it affects magic."

Kelly nodded and walked over. "Like you suggested during our first dive, I've learned to see stamina. I don't think it directly affects mana."

Kelly waited until we were both ready, then cocked her arm back before thrusting it forward and sending out another colorless wave. Watching closely, I saw that once the wave appeared it really was affecting magic, though it appeared to be more of a side effect.

"Well, once the energy leaves your palm it does seem to be affecting mana in the air," I said.

"Could you try that again?" Zak said slowly.

Kelly shrugged and did it a second time. I focused on the wave, this time trying to see what had caught Zak's attention. After a moment he nodded.

"It appears that the shockwave of stamina is moving through a void created in the ambient mana. I suspect you'll find that this pocket is what allows it to move outside of the body without dispersing," Zak explained slowly.

"You're right, it does look like that. Nice observation, Zak," I said cheerfully. "I wonder what else you can do with a similar technique."

It seemed that somehow the burst of stamina was creating a pocket with no mana within it, and that pocket was carrying the stamina along. The realization that one could use mana pockets like that was rather amazing and deserved investigation. Like whether or not you could use your own mana to manipulate the stamina inside your body. That had to have some applications, maybe a boosting effect. I'd have to think on that.



Once that was done we headed to our right; the cliff edge wasn't even, it moved in and out, preventing anyone from surveying large sections of the edge at any one place. Each time we peeked over the edge we triggered a swarm of Cliff Huggers, but much like the first time, we were under very little threat.

We did eventually find a way down, though only George was surprised at how long it took. Kelly and Zak had done this many times before, and I'd done all the research. Leaning over the edge of the cliff, you could see a ledge about five feet down. The ledge looked wide enough for two people to walk side by side comfortably. The wall right next to the ledge had small divots that looked like they were especially made for handholds. You didn't need much strength to work with them either, as they were big enough to fit most of your foot in.

We moved back and started making an early dinner. Both Kelly and Zak were sure we had enough time to get far enough down the cliff to have shelter. Apparently these things had several common attributes that would let us camp on the ledge. Neither me nor George was really happy about the camping spot, but our veterans seemed happy with it.

We then headed down the side of the cliff. Getting my skeletons down was an exercise in the command spell. But I had rebuilt it with this in mind as I got closer to the level where I would have to go down to the plains, so mostly it was just an effort to get it done. So while I managed it without losing a skeleton off the side of the cliff, I still struggled to do so and went slowly.

Fortunately, no one seemed willing to hold the slowness of the skeleton movement against me. Yet I felt more pressure to speed up the longer it ran. And there

really wasn't anything to do to speed things up. Having a skeleton hop off the side of the cliff wouldn't help when we hit a switchback.

The ledge was angled down and headed toward a point where the wall turned out. At some points the path was uncomfortably steep, at others it was far more gradual. We went down the cliff with skeletons leading and trailing as a buffer against attacks.

As we approached a turn in the cliff wall, a shadow separated from the rest and shot right toward one of my skeletons in front. It didn't quite get its shield up in time, absorbing the impact, but instead allowed the Cliff Hugger to snap at its skull. The impact also knocked it off-balance, and the monster beat its wings once and dragged the skeleton and the shield it was still holding off the ledge. Between the four shots from my ranged skeletons and Zak's spell the Hugger died, but its body fell to the ground far below, along with my skeleton.

"And that's why having Kathrine's skeletons on this part takes oh so much of the stress away," Kelly said calmly.

George nodded, a little green as he thought about falling. Seeing this, I decided to make his day easier. "Course, now that I've seen how they'll attempt it, I've got some ideas for stopping the same thing from happening again. Even better, I have an idea on how to deal with this kind of thing more directly. Plus the skeleton is actually much lighter than a person."

George relaxed a little bit. "Thank you, it's just not a pleasant thought falling down there."

"Agreed, but we should be fine. Even sleeping here tonight, it's unlikely we'll have an issue. I definitely won't

be losing a full skeleton per attack,” I stated with more certainty than I really felt.

George shot me a quick grin, Kelly chuckled, and we continued on. There was another attack before we made it to the first switchback. Fortunately the attack was easier to deal with; specifically, I had the safe skeleton strike at a wing to prevent the Hugger from dragging the skeleton it was holding onto away.

At the edge of the ledge was another drop down with just as useful handholds. This time I had far less trouble getting my skeletons down by experience. Unfortunately, there wasn't as much room to work with. If I had my skeletons hop down they would be at real risk of stumbling off the back edge.

We moved down the ledge but quickly found a relatively flat spot with a wider-than-average walkway and stopped here. There was still about an hour until sunset, but Zak and I had set up light spells anyway as the clouds started to cut down on visibility.

After setting up our tents, we gathered around and just talked. The topic was exploiting the weird mana pocket Kelly made with her pain wave thing. Zak was interested because he wondered if it would help with his illusions, making them more durable or whatever. I wondered if I could bind feat-like powers to my personal weapon, and Kelly was looking into creating a couple of different kinds of powers, the advantage of already knowing it was possible for your methods.

My main goal here was to convince them there was more to magic than what we currently knew, and it seemed I had succeeded. The point was that we could use the large grouping of people to become more unique. Personally, my long-term goal was to use the mana pocket

idea as a part of summoning, making it a sort of guild special.

Not only would that help draw more people into the guild, but it would provide a reason to believe that the guild could do things others couldn't. Of course others would figure it out quickly, but I didn't really see this as a bad thing. After all, it would push us to be better and more creative in the use of "mana pocket" effects. From the way Kelly described her "pain wave" ability, I had to wonder if it was a feat with spell-like properties. This implied to me that the opposite was also possible, a spell with feat-like properties.

That aside, our conversation was suddenly interrupted as a massive sheet of water poured down, drowning out conversation for a moment. I turned to look uphill and saw only a trickle of water coming down right up against the cliff face.

"How?" I had to shout a little to be heard.

"You can check. But the shape of the walkway keeps water from running down," Kelly shouted back.

I considered heading back up there but decided against it. "Tomorrow."

The small trickle of water turned out to barely be anything. So we spent some time watching what was rapidly becoming a waterfall from above before heading to bed. The noise was worse than normal, but it soon faded into the background.