

Chapter 20 Talk

Adrian left the potions behind for now but noted the location of the store. There were bound to be more in the town. If he could at least get a few more health potions like the ones he had already used, he could increase his survivability two fold. *And prevent all that pain.*

It was possible that there were some among those he had found but he couldn't be sure. Last time he simply didn't have a choice but to take what he could get but right now, he wouldn't just down an unknown potion. He still grabbed three vaguely red looking ones, just in case he would find himself in a similar situation.

Prayers done and undead laid onto the pile, the two returned. Adrian didn't really know what he should call them. The most apt thing he could think of were morticians. Two morticians taking out the undead in Faenhold castle. He glanced at the man as they walked to his home, thinking if maybe that was exactly what Yrenor was. The spear fighting and magic wasn't exactly fitting, he supposed, but if every dead person turned undead, maybe that was just part of the job.

He heated up some stew for the both of them, handing Yrenor a bowl. "For you," he said, a short pause between the words.

"Thank you," the old man said as he received the food. "Finally talking?"

Adrian nodded as he sat down in the chair he had claimed as his own. He started eating, looking at the man who put away his pipe to do the same.

When Adrian was done, he grabbed his notebook and read the first question he had written down. "Why help I?" he said, not sure about the I and me difference quite yet. He chose the save option that would make sense.

Yrenor chuckled to himself, lighting his pipe again. He looked at Adrian with his eerie dark red eyes. "Because you need it."

And that was that. Adrian had expected he would have to figure out something a little more complicated but he actually understood the words.

"Why?" he asked again. Was there some kind of higher purpose Yrenor knew about? Some kind of prophecy that demanded him to train the newcomer to Faenhold castle?

"You looked tired. Untrained. Lost. And your footwork..." Yrenor explained, shaking his head at the last word while opening his eyes wide. He smoked again and sighed, leaning forward slightly. "Terrible."

"Yeah I understood," Adrian said, chuckling to himself a moment later. *Really? That was it? He just looked so terribly incapable, the man took him in?*

He took a few notes for potential follow up questions but thought the words Yrenor had used to be quite clear. "Who are you?" he asked instead.

"Yrenor," the man said in response, a slight smile tugging on his lips. He knew just how unhelpful he was being.

I'm not getting anywhere with this. Let's spice it up a little. He's seen me come back from the dead anyway.

“Why I here?” he asked. “Here in Faenhold,” he clarified.

“You were dead. I saw it. But now you’re here,” Yrenor said, dragging from his pipe. “You don’t speak Ols. You wear the clothes of knights, the gloves of nobles, and you wield a Faenhold Leaf Spear. But you’re not a thief. Instead you’re lost.” The man paused for a moment, just looking at Adrian. “I do not know why you’re here. I do not even know what you are.”

Adrian sighed. He had written the words down, figuring out the meaning after a few minutes with his many notes. At least the man didn’t think he was a thief. But it didn’t exactly bring him further.

“What about fire? Magic?” Adrian asked.

“Are you human?” Yrenor asked.

Adrian nodded. “Yes. But not from here.”

“A distant land?” Yrenor asked.

“Yes,” Adrian said, thinking it the safest answer. He didn’t really know more either. A lot of evidence suggested that he had come to an entirely different place than Earth but he hadn’t wrapped his head around it all quite yet. And he wouldn’t start blabbering about virtual reality and parallel dimensions with the old man wielding fire magic.

“Those who could wield such magic... if anybody ever could. They are no more,” Yrenor spoke.

“Who could they have been?” Adrian said.

“Do you know of the Guardians?” Yrenor asked.

“I don’t,” Adrian answered truthfully.

“Ancient beings, once capable of great magic. Guardians of Olsdaat and all that lived within,” he said and sighed. “Yet to defy even death...,” he said and shook his head lightly. “There were others too, the King of Faenhold, Merthor. The Witch of Fae, if indeed she does exist. Miralinis, Queen of the White Castle. Lurial,” he said and ground his teeth at the mention of the last name. He looked at the fire and calmed down, continuing to smoke his pipe.

“Those are the Guardians of... Olsdaat?” Adrian asked, writing everything down quickly. Many of the words he thought were simply names.

“No. Just entities who supposedly wielded great magic. Merthor did, as did Miralinis. The rest, I do not know,” Yrenor clarified.

“And you think they brought I here... from my land?” Adrian asked.

“You don’t seem to be lying. Very interesting... perhaps there really was a spell,” the man said.

“You said the Guardians... once wielded magic. Are they no more?” Adrian asked.

Yrenor glanced back at the fire. “Maybe. But the land is dead. Most of it. Its people turned into monsters, both those of Olsdaat and the invaders alike.”

“Are you a monster?” Adrian asked.

The man didn’t reply for a few seconds. “I’m human,” he finally said.

“What happened?” Adrian asked.

Yrenor didn’t answer.

Difficult topic? Adrian thought and decided to change the subject.

“What is Vitality?” he asked. “And why do I see it here,” he added and showed his helmet, tapping it.

Yrenor glanced at him again and leaned forward slightly. “You can see it?”

“If I go really close, like this,” Adrian said and moved the helmet closer to his face.

“Do not share this with others. A powerful gift, to see what is instilled within,” Yrenor explained. “I have heard of few who have this ability. Masters at their craft only.”

“More mysteries,” Adrian mused. “What about levels?”

“Levels?” Yrenor asked.

“When you have gathered enough Essence, you can level one of your values... Vitality for example,” Adrian said. He got more quiet as he went on, the expression on Yrenor’s face shifting to something complicated.

The old man looked at him with narrowed eyes before he sighed and started laughing. “No... not even they could do it,” he murmured. “You can gather Essence? From the air?”

“From the monsters I kill,” Adrian said.

“And you can use it... to increase Vitality?” Yrenor asked.

Adrian nodded. He really didn’t know how this was bigger news than him coming back from the dead. He supposed that coming back didn’t make him stronger, increasing his stats however did.

“And you have no idea how you came to be? Or how you came here?” Yrenor asked.

“I woke up one day, next to a white tree with nothing but my clothes. Didn’t know where I was or why I came here,” he explained.

“White tree? Describe it,” the old man asked.

Did he never go to the royal chambers? I suppose you can’t see it from below, he thought and did as the man asked. He knew that he should’ve been more careful with sharing information but he was just tired of being left in the dark, tired of not even being able to read, tired of keeping secrets from the only person that could help him. And help he did. Yrenor hadn’t done a single thing besides taking his spear that could be seen as malicious.

“Yellowish near golden leaves with a silver spine. Nothing majorly special about the rest of the tree, other than that it was entirely white,” he said after looking up a few words and writing it all down.

Yrenor had a content smile on his face as he looked into the flames again.

“Do you know what that tree is?” he asked.

“I have not seen it myself, but yes. Terranthir, ancient guardian of life,” he said. “Merthor... what did you do?” he murmured.

“One of those you mentioned before?” Adrian asked. “The ones that are gone?”

“Indeed. Now tell me, have you decided what kind of warrior you want to become?” Yrenor asked.

“I don’t want to become anything at all. I want to go back, to my land,” Adrian said.

“That I cannot help you with. If it really was Terranthir that has brought you here, then only Terranthir can bring you back. And in the meantime, you have to prepare, for whatever purpose it has burdened you with,” Yrenor said.

An ancient guardian of life, a magical tree. This is absurd. What purpose could I serve? Why not burden Yrenor with that? He’s much more capable, knows the land, knows the language.

He was pissed. The tree had taken him? Had summoned him here? Without asking, without explaining anything? Just dumping him in a castle full of undead monsters.

“I want to learn about magic,” Adrian said and grabbed his pack, taking out a glass dagger. He used his shaping glass magic to form it into a sphere.

“How did... how did you learn this?” Yrenor asked. “Another blessing?”

“I fell through a window and died after killing an undead with a shard of glass,” Adrian explained.

“Blood and death...,” Yrenor murmured. “Possible. Difficult but possible. Well done. You’re useless with the spear. Magic will suit you.”

Adrian laughed. “Could’ve said that earlier. I spent hours with that thing.”

“And you will spend hours more. But your strongest weapon will be that,” he said and pointed at the glass sphere.

“I would prefer fire to be honest,” Adrian said. “Could you not teach me?”

“Fire has its uses but it lacks versatility. Hot, bright, neither precise nor subtle. A tool for war, for conquering cities and burning down villages. Difficult to use without support. And no, I will not teach you. Because I cannot,” Yrenor said. “Can you see the strength of your magic too?”

“You mean the level? Yes. It’s at level two right now,” Adrian said.

“Good... good. Keep training. I will show you ways to meditate. It will help with your mana. We will need to find equipment for you... difficult in the lower sections but maybe. You could explore more. You cannot die after all. If your Essence allows for it, increase your Wisdom and Intelligence. It will help shape your ability into something frightening,” Yrenor said, looking at him with an intrigued expression.

“You’re starting to scare me,” Adrian said. He had an inkling that his daily training would change come the morrow.

“I send off the remnants of Faenhold. Perhaps it is a sign, for the white tree to bring you to me,” Yrenor said. “Work on your letters, Adrian. And increase your Wisdom and Intelligence as far as you can. For tomorrow,” the man said and stood up with a newfound spring in his body. He walked past Adrian and up to his floor before shutting the hatch.

“That was... a lot,” Adrian said to himself before he went over his notes again.

Terranthir? An ancient tree that summoned me here with some unknown purpose. To a dead land apparently, with magic even a fire mage calls great. With abilities that normal people likely don’t have. No Essence gathering, no seeing equipment stats, no coming back to life. I’ll have to clarify all of that with Yrenor in the coming days and weeks.

He really thought his spear wielding ability had increased quite a bit but if anybody had a say in his prospects, it was the spear master himself. Well he didn't know exactly if Yrenor was considered a master but the way he moved his weapon suggested at least ridiculous proficiency.

Adrian had long decided that magic was his preferred method, if only because he should be able to deal with enemies from afar. Now that Yrenor so vehemently suggested that it was his obvious choice, his doubts were mostly gone. He thought the possibility of his glass magic to be useless to be low but he would still ask Yrenor a few questions before he invested his slowly gathered Essence.

The next day came and the two went to the pyre square.

"Will my magic change if I level it higher?" Adrian asked when they reached the town.

"First is shaping only. You will soon find it more versatile. Did you increase your Wisdom?" Yrenor asked.

"So I'll be able to do more once I reach certain levels with it?" Adrian asked.

"Yes," Yrenor said and showed his left hand, forming a flame above his palm. It flickered and moved slightly. "Shaping," he said before the flame moved away from his hand, floating in mid air. "Flow," he said before the small flame brightened and rushed away, hitting the ground where it spread outward. "You will learn this too, perhaps faster than I ever did. I was never particularly talented when it came to magic."

Adrian checked his available essence and leveled up. Seven hundred Essence for level seven and one point in Wisdom. The cost went up by one hundred for each level. He looked inward when he was done, trying to gauge if he felt a difference at all.

Soulbound:

Essence – 386

Level – 11

Vitality – 16 [23]

Endurance – 10

Strength – 9 [12]

Skill – 8 [12]

Intelligence – 14

Wisdom – 14

Soul skill – Shaping Glass Magic – level 2

Adrian grabbed a glass dagger and tried to reform it, finding the process easier than before. The glass flowed more quickly, into a sphere and back into a dagger. He was aware of the minute changes, the sharpness, and weight. He found himself more aware of everything, or so it seemed. He glanced at Yrenor, seeing his watchful gaze.

"Intelligence. Don't mistake it for experience and training," Yrenor said.

“You noticed that just from my look?” Adrian asked.

“I have seen mages don their battle robes and touch their staffs. You will find the same in a warrior suddenly equipped with Skill increasing armor. Their movements will change immediately. What else have you... leveled higher?” he asked.

“Just Wisdom and Intelligence for now. Before that, Vitality a few times,” Adrian said.

“Good. You’re not incredibly stupid it seems. Be aware that too much Vitality compared to other abilities may bring you into dangerous situations,” Yrenor said but Adrian already huffed.

“I know,” he said.

The man looked at him for a moment before he grinned lightly. “Death is a teacher I knew to be effective, but never did I think the lessons would stay with the one to actually die.”

“Well, there’s a first for everything, I suppose,” Adrian said.

“Now sit down, I will show you a simple way to meditate,” Yrenor said as he sat down cross legged.

Adrian did the same.

“First deplete your mana. I see you’ve trained to copy daggers. Try to make the best one you can. Quality and improvement is far better training than repetition when it comes to magic,” the old man explained.

He focused on the dagger and let the glass flow back into a sphere. Adrian closed his eyes and felt the glass in his hands, imagining a perfect copy of the small blade. He poured as much magic into it as he could, focusing on the edge, the point, the handle, and the guard. He pushed on and tried to make it more compact, thinking of possible design changes that would make it better for throwing when the pressure started somewhere in his mind.

He stopped and opened his eyes, looking at the weapon he had created. It shimmered, reflecting the morning sunlight. No imperfections showed as he inspected it, the weight balanced well. He smiled, happy with what he managed.

“Much better than the last one,” Yrenor said. “Likely just your higher Intelligence and Wisdom. Now close your eyes again.”

Adrian ignored the jab and took the compliment for what it was before he closed his eyes.

“Breathe in, deep. Breathe in as to fill your stomach,” Yrenor said.

That’s not how lungs work, he thought but did so nonetheless.

“Now continue to breathe in, fill your chest,” Yrenor said.

Adrian did and found himself able to pull in more air.

“Good. Now raise your shoulders and breathe in until you can’t anymore,” the old man said.

He did, getting a little more air before he held his breath.

“Now breathe out, slow and deliberate, focus on the sound. Breathe it all out, and now you start again. Stomach, chest, shoulders, and out again,” Yrenor said, repeating his instruction another few times until Adrian simply did it himself. “Another one.”

A few minutes passed and Adrian found himself calm, the pressure from before already gone. All he heard was the sound of his breathing, and the wind flowing past. *Did I do it?* he asked himself and opened his eyes.

“You started thinking again,” Yrenor said. “Good. How did it feel?”

“Disconnected in a way,” Adrian said. “Kind of weird, but not bad. The pressure is gone.”

“Meditation detaches the mind in a sense. It allows you to regain mana far more quickly than without its use,” Yrenor said.

“How much mana do I have anyway? Is there a number to quantify it all? And how much faster is Meditation actually?” he asked.

“Intelligence determines how much mana you regenerate per hour. If you have ten, you will regain ten units worth of mana. The total you can bear within your body is determined by Wisdom, each point adding ten. Before you ask about it, sleep also increases regeneration. By about a factor of two. Meditation comes close as you get better at it,” the man explained. “Now get up and train with your spear.”

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Intelligence – 14

Wisdom – 14

Soul skill – Shaping Glass Magic – level 2

Equipment:

Helmet – Faenhold Soldier Helmet [Adequate]

Vitality +2

Chest – Faenhold Soldier Leather Armor [High]

Vitality +2

Warrior Soul Skill Damage +1

Arms – Faenhold Soldier Bracers [Adequate]

Skill +2

Hands – Faenhold Soldier Gloves [Adequate]

Strength +1

Belt – Faenhold Soldier Belt [Adequate]

Vitality +2

Legs – Faenhold Soldier Pants [Adequate]

Strength +1

Boots – Faenhold Soldier Boots [Adequate]

Strength +1

1h Weapon – Faenhold Spear [Adequate]

Skill +2

Off hand – Wooden Shield [Adequate]

Vitality +1