

Chapter 16 Instruction

Adrian looked at his notes and the sketches drawn next to them. He now had the full set of characters used in this country's language, their pronunciation and a bunch of more or less useful words to play with. Yrenor had turned out to be a capable teacher.

Why exactly the man helped him so willingly was beyond him. Maybe he just wanted to learn about why Adrian was here, and the only way for that to happen was to teach him the language first. Or he took pity on the man lost within the Faenhold castle.

Either way, Adrian appreciated it greatly. He tried again to go through the characters, pronouncing the various words with the phonetic notes he took next to them in English. Well not really phonetic but just an idea of how the characters and words sounded if spoken in his own language.

Yrenor started cooking a broth when the sun started to sink on the horizon, noticeable by the lessening light coming in through the open door. The hearth continued to provide warmth and light either way.

Adrian was sure the man had his assumptions about him, but the man had hardly asked any questions, just sitting there in his chair and smoking his pipe. Occasionally he would get lost looking into the fires of the hearth. Whenever Adrian asked something in return, Yrenor had only gestured at the notes. If anything, he was in no particular rush.

And it turned out that Adrian wasn't either. He had pushed himself to fight the undead when he was still in the castle but mostly to find out where he was, or to find another human being. He hadn't exactly succeeded with both but the next step was obvious. Learn the fucking language. And with little else to distract him, he focused on his letters.

Yrenor occasionally muttered a word or letter while he was chopping up vegetables and potatoes, correcting Adrian with the patience of a sage. He had reacted to the spear Adrian had been carrying and occasionally glanced at the silk gloves he still wore. If anything he was interested to learn more about him, more so than he was interested in killing him. For now.

Adrian knew just as much as Yrenor that he was of no danger to the man. That had surely been a large factor of why this peculiar situation had come to be. For Adrian it meant that he had to make plans in case the man changed his mind. He didn't know yet what he should share with Yrenor, that he suddenly appeared here one day, that he could come back after death, that he had levels and stats. He entertained the idea that Yrenor had all that too, just a normal thing wherever he was.

At least he knew that Yrenor could wield magic, and could speed up suddenly. It was enough already to make him uneasy but Adrian tried to focus on the positives. The salve soothed the pain from his burns and now he could actually focus on something productive that didn't involve constant fighting.

An hour later, Yrenor handed him a bowl of broth.

Adrian nearly choked when he tried it. Unseasoned and watery, the vegetables undercooked and unpeeled. It was still better than eating nuts and berries. He froze at the look Yrenor gave him. Adrian forced a smile onto his face and lifted the wooden spoon while grunting in approval. "Good broth," he lied.

How can you live out here, growing your own vegetables and this is the extent of your cooking skills? he wondered, arguing with himself if that was somehow a sign that the man was in fact a monster in disguise. Until her remembered that there were plenty of people who couldn't cook at all. He himself had known a few that somehow thought food was just a means to an end, nourishment for the human body. A travesty really. What meaning is there to life if food is approached with such apathy?

Adrian didn't mind much, he was hungry after all and hadn't had a warm meal in what felt like years. But the first thing he would teach this man was how to season things. He had seen salt and a few colored powders in some of the kitchens he had scavenged, meaning the issue wasn't a lack of spices.

Yrenor sighed after a while, standing up before he stepped outside.

Adrian looked up from his notes and looked out at the man. He watched Yrenor check the surroundings before he came back in, finally closing the door and locking it. He used a few chains hanging on the walls close to the entrance to further secure the door, connecting the steel to various hooks in the wood Adrian had taken for weapon or coat hangers before.

Now he's got me, Adrian thought.

His look must've suggested something as Yrenor chuckled to himself, going around the room as he checked the boarded windows. He pointed at Adrian and the door, shaking his head and moving his hands in obvious no signs. Then he pointed outside and growled, mimicking some kind of monster with bared teeth and claws.

Adrian couldn't help but smile, not having taken the man for someone quite as theatrical. But the gestures brought the point across, that much was true. He nodded, pointing at himself and then the chair, eyebrows risen to indicate a question.

Yrenor nodded again, pointing at himself and to the stairs leading up. He pointed at Adrian again, closing his eyes before he snored a few times.

"I'll sleep, yes," Adrian said. He didn't know any of those words in the man's language yet, noting down that subjects and simple verbs should probably be the next step after learning the letters. If either were a thing at all.

Yrenor muttered a few words before he went upstairs. He hesitated for a moment before he held out a hand towards the fireplace.

Adrian watched with wide eyes as one of the steel spears suddenly flew through the room, past him and into Yrenor's open palm. The man grunted and went upstairs, closing a heavy sounding latch before he locked it.

A little paranoid? To have another lock upstairs... or maybe this isn't the first time he entertained a guest like me? Are there others? Or maybe it's a common practice... the monsters he suggested are out there, are they the same I saw last night? It would make sense to have separated areas like this... or well, just rooms really. If you at all want to entertain guests you don't trust enough to sleep next to.

His musings distracted himself from the letters, something he hadn't allowed himself to do all day, mostly because of the presence of the other man. He had offered all this knowledge, food, and shelter without asking anything in return, for now. The least Adrian could do was try not to waste the old man's time.

He just summoned the fucking spear... like Thor or something. Is he a god? A sudden thought flashed through his mind. Was Yrenor the reason he was here? Did he somehow summon people from another world or another country? Have them fight against the undead until they would inevitably find him near the pyres?

What would be the purpose of such an endeavor? Why would he choose Adrian of all people?

This isn't getting me anywhere, he thought. He would have to be somewhat careful what to share with the man but so far he hadn't killed him and that already made him the most trustworthy person he had met in these parts. First however, came actually learning the basics of the language.

And so he focused once more onto his letters, until he heard the dull scratching sounds coming from the door. It sounded familiar. *They're here... is it the fire?* Adrian had fed more wood into the hearth to be able to keep reading and to keep the place warm. He sighed and closed his book, putting it into his pack before he wrapped himself into the blanket that had covered his chair.

It was decidedly less comfortable than his royal chambers but he found himself feeling much better. He knew another human being was close by. He didn't know if he would wake up near the white tree again in a few hours, killed by Yrenor after all, but he found he didn't care much. The past days had been long and he hadn't had much sleep. It was warm here and the blanket felt comforting. Adrian had a way to learn this land's language, a way to learn more about why he was here and how he could get the hell back. And he had met another human being, proof that his place wasn't just crawling with monsters alone.

He slowly dozed off as the flames in the hearth died out, the dull scratching from outside stopping as soon as the fire had ceased.

Adrian didn't wake up next to his tree, naked with one more death to note. Instead he was woken by the smell of "broth" and the cool breeze of morning air flowing into the room, the first signs of sunlight pushing through the thicket of the high reaching trees nearby.

Yrenor said a word when he noticed the stirring in the chair, using a ladle to fill two bowls with the wretched creation.

Adrian coughed before he tried to say the same word back, thinking it meant good morning or something along those lines. He got a smile out of the man before he received his cursed breakfast.

"Thanks," he said and started eating, enjoying the warmth in the chilly room.

Yrenor ate in silence, his eyes focused on Adrian.

When both were done eating, Yrenor got up and pointed at the boots near the entrance.

So not a study day..., Adrian thought and went to get his boots, getting them on next to the man.

Yrenor grabbed his spear and walked outside, checking the surroundings.

Adrian pointed at his spear still sitting near the fireplace but received a no in response. Instead the man led him to a small shed added to the side of his home. He rummaged through the contents before he threw a spear at Adrian, the handle made of wood, a steel tip adorning the weapon.

1h Weapon – Faenhold Spear [Adequate]

Strength +2

Not the worst I suppose, Adrian thought and tested the weight and feel of the weapon in his hands.

Yrenor grabbed his own weapon and joined Adrian again, pointing at his pack and back to the house.

“You want me to leave it here?” he asked, taking it off and moving it slightly towards the door.

The man nodded and pointed at the crossbow too.

My only way to maybe deal with you, Adrian thought with a sigh before he complied. He had a choice of course but he’d rather prefer whatever the man had planned than to fight him right here and die.

Yrenor led the way and made it a point to teach Adrian a few choice words. Spear was among them, as were boot and tree.

At least that was Adrian’s interpretation. Spear could also be weapon, or steel, perhaps even the specific word for the Faenhold Leaf Spear. But it hardly mattered. With that word he had a way to describe the tool.

He held up his own spear and said the word in a questioning manner.

Yrenor nodded.

He then unsheathed a dagger and said the word again. This time Yrenor shook his head, saying the word for no, negative, stupid, or whatever else he could be muttering with the gesture.

So it’s just for spears. Good. I’m learning. Where are my increasing Intelligence points?

They continued through the forested area until they came out near the city walls. Nature had started to reclaim some of the stone, slowly creeping up the high walls with tools like ivy and shrubberies.

Yrenor started to teach him more words as they entered through the same tower gates they had used to leave the day before.

Door, floor, handle, coat or fur.

Well was the last word Yrenor taught him when they reached the large square with the pyre. He held up his spear and motioned for Adrian to do the same.

I hope to the gods of this forsaken place that he means to train me.

He mirrored the gesture, Yrenor grunting a few times as he pointed at certain parts of his own spear and arms.

Adrian tried to correct his posture, the way he stood and the way he held the weapon. Until he received a grunt. *Good enough*, he guessed, looking at the man’s face.

Next came a thrust. A simple and fluid motion, perfect in its execution.

This one, Adrian couldn’t copy in just a few tries.

Yrenor put his own spear down and walked over, occasionally correcting Adrian’s form with a few choice interruptions.

I mean this is great... but do you not have anything better to do than to train me the spear? Adrian thought, his theory that the old man was who got him here in the first place seeming more plausible with each passing hour.

Then again he had found the man meditating near the pyre where he was burning undead. Hopefully just undead.

They spent the next few hours in silence, Adrian a little uncomfortable at the man's unrelenting scrutiny but the feeling faded quickly as he focused solely on his form.

Yrenor cleared his throat after a while, the sun already past noon. He gestured for Adrian to follow and started walking into the town.

Adrian noticed that it took them quite some time to find even a hint of undead, the areas they had walked through devoid of any living creatures. When they finally found a group of monsters, Yrenor gestured for Adrian to take care of them.

Alright, I guess I'll show him what I learned in the past weeks, he thought, focusing on the form he had worked on earlier that day.

He watched the undead civilians walk around, checking for any jewelry or expensive looking clothes just to make sure no mage was hiding amongst them. When he was reasonably sure, he walked silently to the first one, his spear slamming through the monster's neck with a decisive and powerful thrust. His form hadn't been perfect, he knew that much. But it got the job done.

Without looking back, he ripped out the spear and continued on to the next one. The sounds were making the others turn but he still had a few seconds. His next thrust came in just as true. By now four undead were looking at him, groaning as they started running towards him.

Adrian breathed in deeply, steeling himself for the assault he would normally run from to get a more favorable position. But he felt that Yrenor brought him here as a test and he was tired of running. The mage had burnt him up so easily, it was time to let off some steam.

The first undead was welcomed by a spear to his face, dying immediately. He got another one in the chest before the two remaining ones reached him.

Adrian slammed his shield into one of the flailing creatures, letting go of his spear as the last one came into his guard. He quickly grabbed one of his daggers and slammed it upwards into the woman's neck, ignoring the nails trying to get through his tough gear. He let go of that weapon too, ripping out the spear from the downed undead before he focused on the creature he had stunned with his shield.

It refocused and rushed at him, Adrian remaining calm as he waited with his spear. This time he did manage to get the form right, the weapon sliding into the undead's neck without issue, its lifeless body continuing onward for half the length of the spear before he removed it from the corpse.

He sighed. It hadn't really been a fight. Just a bunch of undead people, probably once cooks, or tailors. It didn't feel quite as cathartic as he had hoped. *I want to kill that mage*, he realized. Somehow he could accept it that the knight had killed him, the armor and skill with its sword more than a little impressive. But some random undead with fire magic? Making him run away? Burnt and near death? It didn't sit well with him. But he had time on his side, and now he had someone to show him how to fight.

Adrian didn't say anything when Yrenor joined him, looking at the carnage left behind.

The man looked at him with a sad expression, carefully lifting one of the corpses over his shoulder.

Adrian raised his brows but quickly did the same, following Yrenor back the way they had come and towards the remains of the pyre. He watched the man gently place down the undead before he closed the corpse's eyes and murmured something to himself.

Adrian did the same. “Rest in peace, you fuck,” he said in a gentle voice. He didn’t want to offend the man, despite thinking very little of the monsters in this city himself. If they had once been people, they were long gone, just husks remaining that walked around without thought. But it was clear that Yrenor valued his rituals and wanted to properly send off the dead. Throwing them off balconies was probably not one of his preferred methods and Adrian could certainly respect that.

Soulbound:

Essence – 92

Level – 6

Vitality – 16 [27]

Endurance – 10

Strength – 9 [19]

Skill – 8 [12]

Intelligence – 12

Wisdom – 11

Soul skill – Slot 1

Equipment:

Helmet – Faenhold Soldier Helmet [High]

Vitality +3

Fire Resistance +2%

Chest – Faenhold Soldier Leather Armor [High]

Vitality +4

Fire Damage +3%

Arms – Faenhold Soldier Bracers [Adequate]

Strength +2

Hands – Royal Faenhold Silk Gloves [High]

Skill +4

Rogue Soul Skill Damage +3

Belt – Faenhold Soldier Belt [High]

Strength +4

Warrior Soul Skill Cost -2%

Legs – Faenhold Soldier Pants [Adequate]

Vitality +2

Boots – Faenhold Soldier Boots [Adequate]

Strength +2

1h Weapon – Faenhold Spear [Adequate]

Strength +2

Off hand – Knight Shield [Adequate]

Vitality +2