

## Chapter 29 Lone Ranger

Adrian knew a few things about the Wyrd from his previous encounters. They disliked salt, were attracted to fire, and turned into zealous beasts when under attack. He also knew that they couldn't detect a human through a closed door, or at least didn't care enough to go and attack it.

He knew they would follow him once he injured or killed any of them, the ghostly apparitions inciting each other with ear piercing screeches. Tonight, he wanted to find out more about their perception, climbing ability, and general intelligence.

Adrian made sure there was no source of light near him. His instincts let him know that this was a terrible decision, but the familiarity with both his surroundings and the enemy he would face helped overcome the primal fear. For now at least.

He held his breath when darkness descended over the land, the sky darkening with stars soon making their appearance. With them came the Wyrd. Both within the walls and outside, the apparitions appeared, coming into existence as if they had always been there. Adrian's eyes had adjusted with the change and the moonlight shining down on the forests helped a little, and still he could only make out the general shapes. Floating vaguely humanoid beings slowly moving past the groups of undead within the walls, moving past trees and bushes on the outside.

His theory proved right. Far fewer of the spirit like beings could be found out in the wilderness.

*Which means there has to be some kind of connection to either the undead or the people they were before the Whisper,* he thought, clutching his crossbow as he tried to see the beings in the pale moonlight. He thought himself lucky, the mostly clear sky providing just enough light for him to make out his immediate surroundings.

Adrian lit a torch and threw it down into the night, shadows flocking towards the flame as he aimed his crossbow. *Moment of truth.*

He fired and hit his target, one of the ghostly creatures screeching into the night with a sorrowful fury that pierced his ears. And yet it seemed the creature didn't understand exactly where it should've directed its anger towards.

Adrian waited for a whole minute, watching the few beings outside the walled town search with hasted movements and increasingly angry screeches until finally, they returned to the burning torch. Some of the surrounding grass had caught fire by now but as the beings closed in, the flames were snuffed out in turn.

*They consume it somehow,* Adrian thought and quietly checked the situation behind himself and within the town.

Some of the Wyrd had moved closer but none had breached the tower door or managed to climb up.

He spotted a fluttering movement a few meters to his left, a black bird jumping from one part of the wall to another before it flew off and joined the group around the torch.

*This might actually work,* Adrian thought and reloaded his crossbow. He could tell the Wyrd started searching frantically after every strike, the birds now joining in creating a bit of a problem as they flew across the walls occasionally. But he found that if he remained quiet and stationary, the creatures returned to the flames a few minutes later.

It wouldn't be quite as effective as the last night's endeavor but Adrian didn't much care. If he could attack the creatures and survive the night, he'd think of it as a massive win.

His method turned out more effective than any of his previous monster killing. Effective and easy. After a few hours of occasional bolts slowly dwindling away the enemy numbers, he only had a few scares where he had to hide within the tower, a bird getting a little too close for his comfort, hasted and angry just like the other Wyrd.

It just seemed that if they didn't have a direct line of sight to him during his attack, they didn't recognize him as the reason for their torment.

Adrian's bolt supply was used up after about five hours. He assumed it was around four in the morning by then, the first signs of dawn noticeable on the horizon. He spent the next half hour making new bolts within the tower, sitting quietly in the darkness as he worked. *Tomorrow I'll have to bring more. My mana recovers fast enough to allow continuous shooting.*

He found that the Wyrd returned to the flames about three minutes after he had injured them, which meant he could fire about twenty bolts per hour. Another thing he had to bring the next night were more torches. Yrenor may have called this type of hunting cowardly but Adrian couldn't really find himself caring. An exterminator wouldn't fist fight hornets either, but poison or burn them in their sleep instead. He would do the same to the Wyrd if he could.

And so he continued, moving on to creatures within the walls to both get more damage out of single arrows piercing several beings at once, and simply because the ones outside were already dealt with. As he felt the sun slowly rising, he started becoming a little more bold, firing two arrows between the three minute wait times, counting as he did before. The reload time was fast, but a few close calls with nearby birds made him a little wary. Neither did he want to target the flying creatures on the walls, fearing that they'd see him and react instantly, compared to the frantic search caused by their screeching humanoid counterparts.

Two bolts was the limit for now, three causing a few of the creatures to look up at him and charge the walls.

He even heard a few of them breaching the tower door below as he sneaked away to the next one, thus abandoning his hunt for the night.

The sun rose again about half an hour later, banishing the ghostly beings to whatever realm they came from.

Adrian on the other hand emerged from one of the towers with tired eyes and a satisfied expression on his face. The operation was a complete success. He looked down and all he found was shattered glass, some of the bolts retaining a part of their form. Undead moaned and shuffled around in their mindless step, unbothered by the nightly happenings. A few of them lie dead where bolts had pierced the Wyrd and hit them.

He found that a single Wyrd rewarded forty four to forty six Essence. More than five times as much as a single undead. More importantly however, he had no cleanup to do. Nor did he have to actively fight the creatures. He could just sit atop his wall and fire at the beings before hiding himself away again.

The discovery led to a major change in Adrian's daily schedule. Instead of getting up early and going out with Yrenor, he slept late into the afternoon, joining his mentor in town for his training and preparation.

At first he had to spend several days making bolts while gathering both salt and torches. He still tried to get his glass magic to higher levels, fiddling with his crossbow, spear, and other gear. Most of the mana potions were used towards that goal.

Yrenor didn't mind the change in Adrian's activities, busy with his own work either way. He showed interest in whatever Adrian managed to learn of the Wyrd and thought it another way for them to lay to rest the spirits and undead walking through the Faenhold castle both by day and night. He himself still thought the risk too high, especially considering the limits to his magic. Even with potions, he could apparently only throw a few fire spells before he had to stop for the day.

Nor did they want to test how the Wyrd would react to a full blown spell like that. Adrian's crossbow made noise but from atop the wall and against distracted Wyrd, it hardly seemed to matter. Nor was there any source of light involved, letting him fire down onto the creatures with relative safety.

A few weeks passed with Adrian hunting Wyrd, killing over a hundred every single night as he improved the process further. Which meant each night earned him the equivalent in Essence as over five hundred normal undead would have.

Each level increase made the process a little more efficient and comfortable.

All of his Essence so far went into Intelligence and Wisdom, further increasing his magical capabilities as he worked on his glass magic during the afternoons. His potions had run out at that point but thanks to Yrenor, he had a few more places to raid and restock.

The common undead hardly proved a challenge to him at this point, even soldiers and dogs quickly dispatched by either magically thrown daggers, his crossbow, or his spear.

After a few weeks had passed, Adrian had reached the section of the wall close to the part of the town Yrenor had already managed to clear out.

He set himself up for the night, setting down several bags filled with glass bolts before he spread salt onto the section of the wall. The Wyrd birds especially didn't reside on top for very long if any of the salt touched their bodies. And the birds were the only factor occasionally ruining some of Adrian's nights. He nearly died a few times running away from the creatures that despite their size could pick their way through thick wooden doors without too much trouble. Luckily there were dozens of guard towers along the extensive walls where Adrian could continue to run away.

He had water and food ready, plenty of torches to lure the creatures and his improved crossbow that by now could shoot almost like it was made to be semi automatic.

Looking inward, Adrian felt confident in his improved status.

### ***Soulbound:***

***Essence – 168***

***Level – 21***

**Vitality – 16**  
**Endurance – 10**  
**Strength – 9**  
**Skill – 8**  
**Intelligence – 20 [30]**  
**Wisdom – 19 [27]**

**Soul skill – *Flowing Glass Magic* – level 9**

Both Intelligence and Wisdom pushed his glass magic ability further than he had previously expected. The difference a few stat increases made were noticeable even during his nightly *hunts*. The single level increase changed even more, pushing him to experiment further to reach level ten.

When night finally came, Adrian found himself looking over the walls with his crossbow ready. He didn't even prepare a torch however, unable to find any of the creatures he had planned to hunt.

*What?*

He lit a torch and threw it out into the city, the light landing on an empty road, not a single Wyrd coming to investigate the flames.

*Because Yrenor cleared away the undead already? Or does it have to do with the pyres? Which means the undead are most certainly directly connected to the Wyrd.*

Adrian wondered if the creatures were the souls themselves, perhaps still lingering while the physical bodies were walking the streets without a mind. *But the Wyrd don't show intelligence either. Not much more than the undead. Then again, I suppose they don't have a brain.*

He didn't want to risk moving away from his prepared position, instead just settling within the tower to work on his magic instead.

He had already assumed that the Wyrd could be killed or banished in a more permanent manner but the fact that none had remained in the area Yrenor had surely cleared out months or even years ago underlined his belief.

For now he saw little reason to stop his nightly training, mostly considering possibilities once he had cleared out all the areas near the walls. The essence was still very much worth it, providing enough for a level about every four days. If he could do the same from atop buildings in the town, he may be able to comfortably level up for another few months or even longer.

The question was if he really wanted to do that. The Bastion seemed like a promising prospect, but now that he knew a little more about what had happened to this country, and that Terranthir was somehow involved with his appearance in this place, he wasn't quite as sure anymore. It was possible that he found a wizard powerful enough to send him back, but just as much could he be killed or worse, captured. The secret to his resurrection should be safe with him but he had little idea as to the magical possibilities the residents had at their disposal.

If they could read his mind somehow or could force him to tell the truth, he could very quickly find himself in a bind. And yet Bastion remained the only other point of interest next to clearing out Faenhold castle.

He finally decided to at least spend a part of his afternoons in an effort to check out the surrounding areas in the wilderness. There was little harm in learning about the roads and the creatures that may

or may not roam the forest. If he wanted a safe way to get southwards, he would have to clear out the now undead animals either way.

Adrian looked at the rose of glass in his hand, the rather heavy object reflecting the flickering light of his oil lamp. Without him attacking any of the Wyrd, there was no danger of them breaching the guard tower's door.

He grabbed a few more bolts and molded them into spheres. Much of his magical training was simply focused on trying out new things. He had tried making miniature houses, tried forming his face based on a mirror as well as various objects based on a more or less hazy memory. Most of the attempts reminded him of his inability to draw from memory. The rose he held only resembled the actual flower, but even he knew it didn't quite look like one. For that he would've needed a picture or the real deal to look at.

*Ah what a waste of a night*, he thought, resting his head on a bedroll he had taken with him. His daily use of potions prevented him from drinking more and his mana had just barely recovered enough to make the spheres. Any more would bring on the confusing pressure. Not an ailment he wanted to expose himself to if his magic wasn't needed.

He tried to sleep earlier than usual, simply sitting awake for a few hours until he could finally find rest.

When he woke again, Adrian went back to Yrenor's home, stashing what he didn't need for now before he left with his pack, spear, and crossbow. This time he didn't enter the town and instead followed the road leading away from the massive gates. Nature had started taking back the path once more, leaves and bushes slowly growing out onto the dirt, trees overhanging large sections.

The terrain was mostly flat, making the journey less taxing than it could've been. He used his spear as a walking stick and potential defensive weapon should any creatures come out of the brushes.

Nothing showed up however, not a noise coming out of the woods all around here. An occasional breeze went through the bushes and trees, but no running animals, no birds chirping above. He didn't see any tracks or droppings either. If the vegetation around hadn't started to grow more wildly, he might've thought the environment similar to a city part of sorts. Just with an absence of birds and dogs.

Adrian walked for a good hour until he came out of the forest, the stream he had heard turning out to be a small river flowing away from the castle town. The small wooden bridge connecting the two shores looked a little dilapidated but probably sturdy enough to carry his weight still. Beyond the forest ended, the landscape opening up to more rocky terrain, hills to the right going further up until they reached mountain like heights, only visible due to the clear weather. To the left, the hills continued but seemed to flatten out farther away.

He crossed the old bridge, taking slow steps as he held on to the railing on the right. Safely on the other side, Adrian took in the landscape, winds flowing through grasses and trees. He couldn't see a single living creature. What he did see were corpses, some wearing gear that reflected the sunlight. He walked a little closer, covering his nose just in case. The bodies looked human, most of them wearing armor of some kind. They didn't look like undead, though he was sure they had been here for quite some time. However no animal had come to eat them, no birds flying down to eat the corpses.

A chill went down his back as he turned around. This was as far as he would go today. *I'll check the bodies tomorrow. And burn them.*

**Soulbound:**

**Essence – 168**

**Level – 21**

**Vitality – 16**

**Endurance – 10**

**Strength – 9**

**Skill – 8**

**Intelligence – 20 [30]**

**Wisdom – 19 [27]**

**Soul skill – Flowing Glass Magic – level 9**

**Equipment:**

**Helmet – Faenhold Warmage Helmet [Rare]**

Wisdom +5

Wood Magic Control +2%

Stun Resistance +18%

**Chest – Faenhold Mage Robe [High]**

Intelligence +4

Fire Magic Mana Cost -1%

**Arms – Mage Bracers [Adequate]**

Intelligence +2

**Hands – Faenhold Mage Gloves [Adequate]**

Intelligence +2

**Belt – Leather Belt [Adequate]**

Wisdom +1

**Legs – Faenhold Soldier Pants [Adequate]**

Wisdom +2

**Boots – Faenhold Mage Boots [High]**

Intelligence +2

Fire Resistance +3%

**2h Weapon – Faenhold Crossbow [Adequate]**

Skill +2