

# The Storm King

## Chapter 2: Magic

The most noticeable thing about Leon and Artorias' home was the stone obelisk in the very center of a large stone square. It was almost twenty feet tall and every side was covered in carved runes and magical formations. This obelisk was the keystone for almost everything magical within the compound.

Magic was omnipresent in the world, but there are places where it is naturally denser. This obelisk could control the flow of magic within almost two miles, channeling it through itself and into the formations carved onto it. This allowed for a myriad of functions, but its primary purposes were to create a magical field that repelled most weaker creatures that inhabited the forest and to increase the density of magic in the air.

The former function wasn't strictly necessary, as the wards in the walls of the compound did the same thing. However, Artorias refused to take any chances when it came to personal safety and indulged every crazy fantasy that popped into his head. He had felt the sting of loss fifteen years ago and was not going to take any chances.

There were five buildings around the obelisk, forming three sides to the pavilion with one more side for the tunnel exit. On opposite sides were Leon and Artorias' houses. They were the largest of the buildings and the only ones with windows. The far side had the three smaller buildings, consisting of the ice shack, the main storage room, and the pelt storage room. All five buildings were made of the dark wood from the forest and contained similar wards to the walls of the compound.

By the time Leon and Artorias returned, night had long since fallen and all they could think about were their beds.

"Just stick the thing in the ice shack, we'll deal with it tomorrow," said Artorias, eyeing his house.

Leon led them to the door of the shack and kicked it open. He was immediately assaulted with a gust of cold air. The floor of the shack was made of a single slab of stone which had a glyph made of ice runes etched into its surface, keeping the wooden building chilled to below freezing. While there were a few carcasses already hanging up in the room, Leon and Artorias just lazily tossed the stag down on the ground and left.

"You did good today, boy. I'll let you sleep in tomorrow, but don't think tomorrow's training is cancelled!"

"Sure thing, dad."

Leon smiled. He wasn't sure if his father was letting him rest longer as a reward for killing the stag, or as an excuse to sleep in himself. *'I suppose it doesn't matter. Either way I'm getting a ton of sleep tonight,'* he thought with great anticipation. Leon was very much not a morning person and he relished every day he could sleep in.

He walked towards one of the houses by the pavilion, while Artorias made for the other. As Leon pushed open the door, there was a brief flash of blue light quite similar to the one on the door leading into the compound indicating that even Leon's house had been heavily warded.

Leon's house wasn't particularly big, only three small rooms.

One was the living area, with a table, two chairs, and a bench covered in furs near a fireplace.

His bedroom was just as simple, with a fur-covered bed, four large chests, and a small furnace.

The final room was no larger than a closet, with the only thing in there being a crude toilet leading to a thin underground trough that flowed out of the compound and a water rune to flush everything out. Not a perfect solution to the waste problem, but neither Artorias nor Leon were engineers skilled enough to make a standard sanitation system.

As Leon entered his house, he casually brushed his hand against a gently glowing magic circle next to the door and the fire rune carved onto the bottom of the fireplace lit up, instantly forming a crackling fire.

He placed his bow on a pair of hooks on the wall and set his quiver in the nearby corner, next to a woodcutting axe. He then took off his grass shirt and collapsed onto the bench in front of the fireplace.

There was nothing he wanted more than to go climb into bed and pass out; it had been a physically draining day. The hunt itself wasn't anything special, but that stag they brought back was large and heavy. There was also the attack Artorias had fended off. Even though he didn't let Leon help fight the attackers, it had still left Leon tense and on edge.

All told, Leon had expended quite a bit of the magic power held in his blood in order to keep his body moving and he needed to recover a little before going to sleep. As he was only a first-tier mage and thus couldn't generate magic power within his body on his own, he needed to meditate and perform some breathing exercises to take in the magic in the air.

Before he began in earnest, though, Leon got back to his feet and opened both wooden panels covering the windows in the living room. He then sat back down, enjoying both the heat from the fire and the cool night air the wind brought in through the windows.

He breathed in, held it for a moment, then breathed out. He inhaled, held it, then exhaled. He continued this calmly and consistently, holding the air in his lungs for a moment longer each time.

As he breathed, Leon's heart rate slowed. His heart began to beat so slowly that it almost seemed like Leon had died. The color in his tanned arms and face drained away to match his pale chest. His extremities grew cold, but Leon didn't shiver once.

As Leon's bodily functions slowed to a crawl, his breaths began to sync up with the wind, inhaling as it picked up and exhaling as it died down.

The magic from the air filled his lungs and bit by bit, made its way into his bloodstream. This magic energy flowed alongside his blood, but it didn't truly fuse to become mana until entering his heart. Leon's lungs didn't absorb very much magic, but every heartbeat fused it into his blood, slowly increasing his mana reserves.

Humans are not naturally able to use magic and must adapt their bodies to make use of it. As a first-tier mage, Leon had completed the initial steps of this process and adapted his lungs to absorb the magic energy in the air he breathed.

This magic then entered his body, fusing with his blood to form mana and then flowing throughout his body. The next step in the adaptation process comes when Leon's muscles have been saturated with mana long enough to start storing magic power. During the adaptation, physical training is of paramount importance as the more blood that can flow through the muscles, the faster they grow and adapt to magic.

The biggest change at this point—the one that brings a mage up the second-tier—is when their heart fully adapts to magic power, allowing a comparatively immense amount of magic to be stored within the mage's body. The heart becomes the core of everything a mage is, no longer simply pumping blood but storing more than ninety percent of their magic supply.

At Leon's current level of power, once his heart adapts, his supply of magic will almost triple overnight and continue to rapidly grow for several weeks afterward. Given that he is able to channel magic through the muscles in his palms and into the runic enchantment on his bow meant that he was getting close to crossing this boundary.

After that will come his bones. As the bones adapt to magic, they strengthen and harden. A late second-tier mage would think nothing of jumping off a four-story building as they would be completely uninjured from the fall.

However, that mage wouldn't step into the third-tier until their magic sinks deep into their bones and their bone marrow adapts. Once this happens, the mage will be able to generate magic within their bones, creating mana alongside their blood. A third-tier mage would no longer need lengthy meditation sessions to recover from magic

depletion and even stronger mages are capable of recovering magic power at an almost noticeable rate.

It is only once a mage has crossed the boundary into the third-tier that they are no longer considered a novice in the arts of magic, but most tribesmen who practice these arts are unable to surmount it. Those who do are usually the tribal chieftains and their thanes.

This was very different in the south, though, as Artorias had told Leon that the vast majority of the knights in the Bull Kingdom were all of the third-tier or higher. The best knights reached the third-tier before the age of twenty, that being when they were awarded their knighthoods. If they were still below the third-tier by then, they might still earn their knighthood, but their career in the king's service would be limited.

Leon was determined to meet that standard. When he became a first-tier mage at the age of eleven—after only two years of training—he was beyond elated. It had been five years since, five years of very slow growth. Leon had been growing nervous at the seeming lack of progress, but when he asked his father about it, Artorias had simply smiled and told him not to worry about it, to let things happen in their own time and to not try and force anything. Leon had tried to put it out of his mind, but the fear and frustration was still there, always in the back of his mind. He trusted his father, but he only had three years left to achieve the third-tier.

Leon meditated within his house for over an hour before finally going to bed. He had recovered a good portion of his power, but he would still need to meditate tomorrow before being back at his peak.

By the time he woke the next morning, the sun was already high in the sky and he could hear Artorias training outside. Despite this, Leon still laid back in bed, enjoying a few moments of peace and rest before he began his own training.

He left his house about thirty minutes later, dressed in light leather shorts, a sleeveless shirt of woven grass, and leather sandals. Artorias was dressed almost identically, which wasn't too surprising given their simple lifestyle. And, of course, those woven grass shirts were light, very comfortable, and deceptively sturdy, making for perfect training wear.

Artorias was sitting cross-legged in front of the stone obelisk with his eyes closed and back straight. There were no visible changes to the obelisk, but Leon could vaguely feel the magic in his surroundings being channeled through the obelisk and towards Artorias. What Leon found most curious, though, was that Artorias wasn't actually absorbing any of this power. In fact, it didn't even feel like Artorias was actively pulling the magic energy towards him, but more like the magic moving towards Artorias was just its natural course.

As Leon got closer, he could feel the magic surrounding his father rapidly revolving around him like a magical cyclone. Artorias didn't often train where Leon could see him, so the boy decided to observe his father for a while, to see if he could learn anything from it.

The magic flowed around his father, forming a small tornado with Artorias at the center. Leon could see tiny water droplets being pulled from the ground and entering the cyclone, but the dirt and gravel of the pavilion remained largely motionless.

As Leon watched, whatever Artorias was doing intensified. The cyclone grew in power, and started affecting the air around Artorias and formed an actual cyclone. It was too weak to even pick up pebbles more than a few inches off the ground, but it kicked up a ton of dust and dirt and nearly knocked a very surprised Leon backwards.

Several seconds later, the wind died down and Leon wiped the dust and water droplets off his face. Artorias was standing, looking at him with a big smile on his face.

"All right, consider me duly impressed. That's what you were going for, wasn't it?" Leon said as he regained his balance.

"Oh? You think I need to impress my own son? Whatever would give you that impression?"

"Because you always disappear when you want to train, and it's almost invariably when it's raining. You most certainly don't come out here for demonstrations, especially when it's this sunny out...side..." Leon had just looked up for a moment when his words got caught in his throat.

The weather was beautiful, without a cloud in the sky. The only exception was a single, dark grey storm cloud directly above Artorias. The cloud wasn't very big, small enough that Leon hadn't noticed until now, and was gently spinning like the cyclone that had surround Artorias just now.

"Finally noticed, have you? I almost thought I would have to point it out."

Leon had never seen something like this before. When the weather would take a turn for the worse, Leon would always head inside, but Artorias would always leave the compound and go... somewhere.

"When you took down that stag, it showed me that you're ready for a more intensive training schedule. You're almost a second-tier mage, and there are things you need to know."