

# The Storm King

## Chapter 4: Preparations

Leon walked over to the storage shack and grabbed a wooden practice sword. Artorias also picked up a practice sword and both walked back to the pavilion.

“Alright, little lion, show me that you are ready to awaken your power. Come at me, let me taste your strength.”

Leon slowly circled Artorias, his weapon held at the ready. On the other hand, Artorias barely even bothered holding a decent sword posture, simply letting his arm hang at his side with the sword all but stuck in the ground.

The practice weapons that Artorias had made were all lightly enchanted. Nothing too fancy, just a small light enchantment that made them glow when filled with magic. This allowed Artorias to see how well Leon was imbuing his weapon with magic power and allowed Leon to get accustomed to using his magic in this way.

Leon continued to slowly circle Artorias, but the older man didn't even turn to face the younger. Eventually, Leon had made his way to behind Artorias, but at his father's level of strength, this hardly mattered. Artorias hadn't even moved his head, but Leon had never left his sight.

Leon swung his sword down towards Artorias' shoulder, but right before the wooden blade hit the man, Artorias took a half step to the side and spun to face Leon, and the sword tasted nothing but air. Leon wasn't discouraged, though, and followed up with an upward slash, this time aimed towards Artorias' arm. Again, Artorias easily dodged at the last second.

Leon drew back and stabbed towards his father's stomach, but Artorias simply raised his own sword just enough to deflect Leon's sword away from him.

Their training sessions always began like this, with Leon not even being able to touch Artorias no matter how fast he moved, and Leon moved fast indeed. Every time he attacked, Artorias would dodge, block, or deflect like it was the easiest thing in the world. Leon barely even got angry over it anymore, one thousand and one losses are hardly different than one thousand, after all.

Eventually, Artorias would slow down, and allow Leon to start getting close and would start fighting back. An enemy would never let Leon simply attack without making a move, and Artorias' training would never be so passive.

After about half an hour, Leon and Artorias changed out the wooden swords for swords of blunted metal. These blades of low-grade iron had similar enchantments to the previous, lighting up when magic is channeled into them. Leon's blade glowed a dull white, but Artorias didn't even bother with it.

At first, Leon pressed his attack, slashing and hacking at Artorias, aiming at joints and vital points. Artorias blocked again and again and started throwing his own counter-attacks into the exchange. Leon would dodge just like his father, but much slower and with less precision.

Artorias slashed down at Leon's chest, but Leon swiftly parried and followed up with a counter attack. Artorias blocked and slammed his body into Leon's. The younger man reeled but stayed upright and quickly regained his footing. However, Artorias had taken advantage of Leon's brief vulnerability and attacked again, with Leon barely dodging in time.

At this point, Artorias had Leon completely on the defense, not able to get a single attack in. Artorias finally ended it when Leon blocked his attack, only to have his feet swept out from under him, bringing him to the ground.

"You still over-swing. Getting all your strength and body weight behind your attack is good, but the wind up you have beforehand gives it away. And you overstep when lunging forwards. Makes your footing rather unstable and leaves your leg vulnerable. An experienced fighter will knock you to the ground before you know it." Artorias bent down to help Leon back to his feet. "Remember, don't take one step when you need two. But you can't take three when two will do, either. Keep your forward steps in battle about the same distance as when walking, and you should be fine."

Leon began again, trying to keep Artorias' words in mind. He carefully measured his movements but began to get distracted when Artorias pressed his own attack. Eventually, he was knocked down again with another sweep of Artorias' leg.

"Good. Or, well, better at least. Again!"

Leon rose again and attacked, only for Artorias to knock him down again. They continued like this for about an hour, before having a brief rest and moving on to other weapons. Artorias made sure that Leon was at least semi-competent in several weapons, but Leon favored longswords so that got the most attention. Artorias himself preferred swords so it worked out well, but he also gave basic instruction in shorter one-handed blades, spears, and axes.

After the morning's weapons training came strength training. This mostly involved using carved rocks and boulders as weights. Only Leon participated in this part, as Artorias was too strong for such conventional means of training.

While Leon sweated lifting stones, Artorias went back to sitting and meditating before the obelisk. Leon slowed down to better observe Artorias as the older man formed another magical cyclone until a powerful gust of wind nearly knocked him over.

“Don’t slow down, keep going!” Artorias may have reprimanded Leon, but he was still smiling at the interest his son showed in his magic.

The training eventually stopped when Leon’s stomach growled like an angry bear, and Artorias’ responded in kind. The two almost literally dropped what they were doing and walked over to the ice shack.

“So, what are you in the mood for, little lion?” Artorias asked with a smile.

“That bread we made a few days ago was damned good, and maybe some of those Greenhand potatoes. We still have some of that wild turkey, right? Maybe some of that.” Leon responded with the utmost seriousness. The two men treated their food as business of the utmost importance and oftentimes would debate for longer than an hour about what to eat.

“Yes. Yes to all of that.” Fortunately, they both agreed about their meal and pushed open the door of the ice shack. What they saw immediately stopped them in their tracks.

The smile disappeared from Artorias’ face, and he said, “But first, we should probably deal with this.”

The stag from the day before was still on the floor. Both had clearly forgotten about it after getting caught up in training.

They looked at each other, and their stomachs growled again.

“Should... we just hang it up and deal with it tomorrow?” Leon suggested.

Artorias looked conflicted for a moment, but a quick glance at the bread basket was all he needed to agree. They quickly tied up the stag and hung it from the ceiling next to several other, smaller, animals.

The two grabbed what they needed for their meal and went outside.

In front of Artorias’ house was a small awning over a stone slab. The slab had several heat runes carved into it, and the two used them like oven burners.

After a hearty meal, Leon walked over to the small pond behind his house and sat down to meditate. Artorias had dug a pair of three-foot-deep holes, one behind his house and one behind Leon’s, and lined them with stone bricks. On the center-most brick on the

bottom of the ponds, he carved a water rune, which kept the ponds filled with clean water that each of them could use for bathing.

Leon liked to meditate in front of his pond and had even planted a few bushes and small trees around to give himself some privacy.

Meanwhile, Artorias had pulled out a number of wild plants he'd picked and had begun to boil and grind some of them down into a light-grey paste. Others were boiled and mixed into a brown tea that he filled a water skin with. Others still had been dried and preserved, and he simply packed them up into a small satchel. His paste and water skin joined them in the satchel, and he moved on to weapon maintenance.

Leon and Artorias would often venture out of the Forest of Black and White, usually to trade their pelts with the local tribe in the nearest Vale, but sometimes Artorias would take Leon down south to the kingdom for training.

Most of what they'd buy from the tribe would be clothing or food, but sometimes Artorias would get something like weapon oil for his longsword, paper for making spell runes, or certain alchemical ingredients.

Artorias had little skill or knowledge of alchemy, but he did know how to make what he needed for bloodline awakening, and that was what he prepared and packed away into the satchel.

His longsword didn't need a whetstone to keep it sharp, as it was clearly a magical weapon even though there weren't any obvious enchantments, but he liked to keep it polished to a near mirror shine.

After polishing the blade, he pulled out some of his paper and inscribed several lightning runes onto the sheets. These lightning spells then went into the same satchel he'd prepared before, next to a few first aid spells.

All this took about four hours, and by then Leon had finished meditating and regained his full strength. Not that that was saying much at his power level.

"Leon! Come over here." Artorias called out to his son when he saw him come out from around his house.

"What's up?" He asked as he walked over.

"We'll be leaving tomorrow for a few days. Make sure you're packed and fully rested by morning. We'll need to find something good to kill so you can awaken your bloodline."

Leon smiled in anticipation. "What do you think we should be on the lookout for?"

“Obviously, something with magic. That stag you brought down yesterday, while impressive, won’t do.”

“How about another wind wolf? I’ve already killed one of those.”

“No, that won’t do either. Wind wolves are far too weak. You need something stronger than you, or it won’t catalyze the change in your blood we want. What the ritual does, basically, is poison you with the mana of a magical beast, with the body forced to awaken its blood in order to combat it. If we go too weak, then your blood won’t be woken. We’ll have done all this for nothing and I’ll have to reacquire the ingredients I’ve gathered. We only have enough for one try, so we have to get it right.”

“How about a black-iron bear? I think I could bring one down, given the opportunity.”

“Hmmm, that might work, but I’d prefer a surer thing. A river nymph or a tree sprite would be better, but they don’t fill me with confidence.” Artorias’ expression suddenly changed. He normally had an easy-going smile, but now he looked rather conflicted, and maybe a little worried. A possibility had occurred to him. “There is something that would all but guarantee success,” he said softly, more to himself than to Leon.

Leon waited a few seconds before asking “What?”

Artorias hesitated a moment before answering. “...An ice wraith.”

Leon’s expression of excitement immediately fell away, to be replaced with one closer to fear and dread.

“An ice wraith would definitely be sufficient... but we’d need another core.” Artorias looked at his son after saying this and continued. “You’ll need an enormous amount of preparation, but it might be possible for you to do it.”

Practically speaking, Artorias could kill an ice wraith with relative ease and take its core, as he had done the day before, but that was not the point. There were some things about parts of this ritual that Artorias wanted his son to do himself. But an ice wraith was unquestioningly out of Leon’s league, and if push came to shove then Artorias would rather spoil his son than let him continue to grow up with his bloodline remaining dormant.

“Here’s what we’ll do, we’ll go out tomorrow, and spend a few days scouting around. We might find something more suitable, but if not, we can always risk taking on an ice wraith.”

Leon looked a little better after Artorias said this. He desperately wanted to get stronger, but not so bad he’d take that great of a risk. Long ago, Artorias had told him that he should never fight any kind of wraith head-on unless he was at least a fifth-tier

mage. Leon had taken this advice to heart, and the prospect of fighting a wraith terrified him.

“Alright, we’ll head out tomorrow morning, so go pack your things and get some rest.” Artorias was back to his usual smiling self, but Leon was decidedly less cheerful.

As Leon walked back to his house, there was only one thing on his mind. *‘Dad said a river nymph or a tree sprite would probably do. I’ll just look for one of those in the next few days. Fighting a wraith is suicide, and there is no damned way I’m fighting one anytime soon.’*