

The man who wrote the book on survival, Garland Grey, had an interesting way of doing things. Each section of the book was preceded by an anecdote that bordered on the unreal. At first, I believed that the author was playing himself up to try and sell the book - but as I read deeper I began to realize that those tales often illustrated aspects of the skill that he would cover in the following chapter. And after I had put the book down for the night I found myself remembering those tales; they were there to help you remember the clinical parts of the process.

I found it more interesting than the two religious books that Redd and Centus had given me. I was always the type of person who enjoyed more practical books like this. I could really dive into it and imagine the scenarios where I could use the things I'd learnt. The book detailed plants animals and which were safe to hunt and eat. The different types of flora you'd find and how they could be used as building material for makeshift or more permanent shelter. Basic medicine using herbs and supplies that could find in the wild or at your local market.

As much as I enjoyed reading the book, I still needed to put some of those skills into practice. Additionally, it only detailed flora and fauna from the continent I was on. If I were to go outside of those bounds those nuggets of information may find themselves wanting.

Survival was its own skill, with levels and bonuses to go along with it. I needed to go out into the field and test them out to get it. The next morning, I took a long stroll outside of the city limits and into the wilderness to test myself out. I started by picking some of the plants that I recognized as safe and pocketing them for later. I could use them to make a primitive form of medicinal potion using a bit of hot water.

I found a nice empty space that nobody was near to try things out. First, I checked the perimeter for suitably dry pieces of wood. It had rained the day before, but I was able to find small sticks and logs that would do the job nicely. I threw them into a big pile in the middle of the clearing. I surrounded the wood with rocks to make a fire pit.

The first order to business was to test the medicine that Grey had detailed. The herbs around the city had healing properties when properly processed. Grey had not taught me how to properly process them, that was a task left to herbalists and apothecaries. I laid out a spread of the plants I had gathered. I had two stems of the healing herb in good condition.

I hopped over the fire pit and headed to the nearby stream. I needed water to make the potion. It was only then that I realized that I had no container to keep the water inside. Thinking quickly, I unstrapped one of my armour pieces and used it to scoop up the water from the river. It wasn't the cleanest, but in an emergency situation anything was better than nothing.

I carefully tiptoed my way back to the camp, making sure not to spill any of it in the process. Taking a flat sided rock to keep it off the dirty floor, I put the plate down gently next to the fire. I'd made it back with a fair amount of water despite the less than ideal tool I'd used. In Garland's own words, "There was no substitute for a proper tool." A rationale he applied before every piece of advice he gave. There would be no need to make your own medicine if you prepared before

departure, nor would there be need of structures built from twigs and leaves if you simply brought a tent.

I had water, I had the herbs, now I needed the fire. I dragged Stigma over to me and leant her up against one of the larger rocks. I'd found a piece of flint while digging around, which made my life much easier when it came to starting a fire. I took a dry leaf and held it under the sword. I struck the edge of Stigma with the flint, sparks flew, and the leaf took light immediately. I cupped it in my hands and threw it onto the fire.

The rest of the dry timber and undergrowth was quick to follow suit. Soon enough I had a roaring fire to keep me warm and heat whatever food I found. I pulled over the other rock covered with my herbs. Taking a smaller, smooth pebble I slowly ground them into a mushy paste. Again, a proper mortar and pestle would do the job much faster.

I placed the metal plate onto the flame and allowed it to heat the water. I was going to have to wait until the fire died down to take it off, but it would be fine for putting the herbs inside at least. I wasn't going to actually drink the thing, just make sure that it worked. I took my makeshift stone plate and poured the herbs into the water and allowed it to sit.

That would be good enough for minor injuries and ailments according to the book. When worst came to worst, you could stem your injuries by using this simple recipe. The potion couldn't be bottled up for later because it lacked a key ingredient that stopped it from spoiling. That was a secret kept by the alchemists.

In the end it formed a nasty looking green sludge with pieces of plant floating in it. It did not look pleasant to drink, but when it came to matters of life or death there wasn't much choice. I scanned it using my spell.

Primitive Minor Healing Potion

Restores 3HP - has a foul aftertaste.

Quality: Poor

It restored a slight amount of HP when drunk. Good enough for stabilizing life-threatening injuries, but you'd still prefer to use a professionally produced one. A few seconds later another pop-up appeared in the corner of my eye. I'd successfully learned the survival skill!

SKILL LEARNED

Basic Survival

- You can now craft primitive potions and medicine.
- You are now familiar with most flora and fauna on Sharlinel.
- You can build basic forms of shelter and amenities from common materials.

+1 Strength

+1 Perception

+1 Perception

I was shocked at how many bonus stats that came with. Now I had 7 strength, 7 perception and 8 intelligence. Halfway to my next level, a few hours of hunting could see me reach level four and another point in my strength stat.

It's hard to describe the feeling of suddenly just knowing a bunch of stuff I didn't before. Suddenly the incredibly shoddy work I'd done putting together the fire and the potion offended me on a deep, instinctual level. I could also suddenly name and specify everything that I'd gathered even though nobody ever told me what their names were.

My mind was aflush with a dozen ideas on what I could make from the sticks and leaves scattered around the small clearing, but I was happy with my work for the day. I took my armour plate and washed it off in the river, before reattaching it to myself. I kicked dirt over the fire and scattered the rocks I'd used. It had been a very productive day.

Stigma hadn't spoken to me since our friendly chat the day before. And even when I was using her as a survival tool she had nothing to say. I sighed and hoisted her over my shoulder. The weight was still incredible, but it was getting easier with every point to carry her long distances.

The winding roads that ran between rocky outcroppings and twisting trees were a treacherous place for travellers. I saw a multitude of stranded wagons that had been abandoned at the side of the road and left to the mercy of the elements. I knew I was close to the city when I heard the sound of swords clashing. Out on the farmland dozens of tents had popped up from nowhere, and now the mercenaries had made themselves at home.

It was like the city was under siege. I'd heard how unhappy the people were on the streets were about it. They were being occupied, half of the city had been set against the other. Everyone was pointing fingers, but nobody had any answers. Somebody would need only throw a match onto the stockpile and blow the whole thing to hell and back.

I just hoped I was well clear when it happened.