**Chapter 9 Obtaining the First Spell**

I awoke so sore I couldn’t move. Yes, that was a lie. It was just excruciating to move. The pain triggered a memory of the first day of wrestling practice in high school when the coach decided to check out the team’s conditioning for the entire practice. I grabbed the lemon-scented salve and used the rest of it on the most painfully sensitive muscles and more significant bruises.

I sat in my bed and found the leather backpack nearby that contained the book of coins and the light stone. It was still a little dark outside, so using the light stone, I explored the pages. The coins within were drawn to scale, and weights and metal alloy content were for each of the coins. The book was well written as well.

Each page had a brief history of where the coins came from and then located that site within the World Sphere before having detailed images and denominations of the coins. The most fascinating coins were the dungeon coins. Each dungeon manifested loot, which usually included coins, according to the stories I had read. But dungeon coins usually depicted monsters on both sides, usually floor challenge bosses.

If I had a bestiary, I could probably figure out what monsters resided in the dungeons just from the coins. According to the book, most civilizations in the sphere melted down dungeon coins and restamped them in their local currency. Dungeon coins were pure metal. Civilizations added other metals, reducing their purity but increasing their hardness. I thought this was truly a waste looking at some of the artwork on the dungeon coins. I had only made it a quarter of the way through the book before the house started stirring. It was my father’s turn to cook, and I smelled bacon and eggs. I thought I had better get up before he burned the eggs.

At breakfast, Freya was super excited, and I was happy as well because I had managed to save the eggs from my father’s cooking. Freya rarely got to go into the city. Since Gareth and I were usually just on errands when we went to the city, we didn’t take her often because she wanted to explore the various shops. After breakfast, I got my best backpack, dressed in my best clothes, and gathered all my coins. I planned to spend most of the day in the city and had a few purchases in mind. My gold coins needed to be altered to include 11% silver. I could do that while we walked, sticking my hand into my money poach. Doing this would be a pain but would also increase my gold coins by 10%, so it was worth the effort.

When I exited my room, Freya was ready to go, and I slipped her the promised coins for her to spend at Sweets and Treats. Gareth was outside waiting, but he had other plans, “Storme Captain Callem said we should do the stretches every day.” How could the big guy still move? And he wanted to stretch? I conceded and stretched with him while groaning and grimacing the entire time but only voiced two or three complaints aloud, well two or three loudly enough for him to hear. Freya thought it was hilarious, especially since Gareth didn’t complain once and kept correcting my form. An hour later, we were off to the city. Freya and Gareth were having a lively conversation while I wept internally from the pain of simply walking and trying to focus on altering my gold coins.

At the city gates, I palmed Gareth three large silver coins as I was heading in a different direction. I noticed a few local kids around the gate but didn’t recognize them. I used my ability to get their names in case I needed them later. I was then off to see Wigand.

I entered Wigand’s shop a short time later with a rough plan. I would put a deposit down on a spell in the name of my mysterious benefactor. However, when I entered the shop, I stopped dead. Under the one long glass case reserved for his most expensive books was a large book bound in a silvery, shimmering cover.

“Storme!” Wigand said with a massive grin on his face. “It is an impressive book. A patron brought it by. Found it in storage after his grandfather’s passing. He charged me with selling it. The cover is from a lightning drake hatchling hide. It shimmers like that because the scales have not formed yet. The cover itself is worth a large gold but the contents! It contains within its pages the original schematics and runic inscriptions for the original Harbinger Skyship!”

Well, that sounded impressive, but I didn’t know what it meant. Fortunately, he continued, “The Harbinger Warship Storme! The core battleship of Skyholme’s fleets!” I tried to remember, but it was outside my current education. Exasperated at my lack of excitement, “Storme, the first Harbinger, was built some 2000 years ago, designed by the famed shipwright Vaso Vidalatos. The Harbinger became the ship that allowed us to successfully claim all eight islands and has been integral to repelling attacks from beasts, lowland kingdoms, and expanding our influence in the sphere. The Harbinger boy!” He went to a shelf behind him, returned with a book, and thrust it into my hands. The title read, The History of the Skyholme Navy. “You can borrow that for a week, no charge.”

Then it clicked for me. Wigand had a dozen skyship miniatures in his back room. I had been back there twice, and each skyship was a meticulous model, even having small figures on the deck. Wigand had said they were famous warships that had perished in battle. “So, are you going to purchase the book for yourself?” I asked, making small talk, and Wigand scoffed.

“Oh, I will page through it…but the price? If I had a conservative estimate…20 platinum, but most likely two to three times that number at auction. I could never afford that even if I sold all my books. Well, maybe if I sold all my books. But I am in line for a 10% commission on the sale, which I could make in half a year! The *High Auction House* in the capital is coming to get it tomorrow morning.” He looked disappointed at the last. “The book has magic laced into it. It will never rot but can not be duplicated by magic means.” He sighed. He pulled the book out and placed it on the counter. “You may look.”

I came forward and touched the clasp. I sent my metal sense into it—it was platinum. It was my first time getting a feel for the metal, and I thought now I might be able to use my ability to create it. I started paging through and was instantly enthralled with what was detailed within. The beginning text detailed the best lumber and the preparation of the wood after it was harvested. Then came the ship’s construction schematics. It was awe-inspiring and detailed. The ship looked sleek and predatory. Much more impressive than the cargo haulers and shuttle airships I had seen growing up. I was hooked and intense in my study as I turned each page. A stupid grin and smile were pasted on Wigand as he watched me.

Then the book’s second half had the runic inscriptions that made the skyships fly powered by aether crystals harvested from dungeons. Studying the runes made me dizzy, but they did remind me of something I had flashes of from my past life, circuits. There was a flow to them far beyond my understanding, but it drew me in. I wanted to understand, and I wanted to build my own skyship. Reluctantly I closed the book. I needed to focus on today’s business.

“Wigand, I came here today on behalf of my patron. She is seeking a book on creation magic, creating objects from aether directly. She has promised to get me a tier 1 spell if I can procure such a book. So I am also seeking the cleanliness spell for myself. She advised me, for a first spell, that it is versatile and also what she uses to make her coins shiny and new.” My gaze fell on Wigand’s prized book, my thoughts were still straying to what had just regaled my vision. Sixty platinum for that book—I asked, “How much does it cost to build a Harbinger?” I was off-topic, but I thought the side comment would help obfuscate my requests and perhaps give me something to strive for.

As he was putting away the silvery tome and locking it behind his security measures, Wigand responded, “The classic Harbinger costs about 250,000 gold to build, or at least that is what the Triumvirate reports as the cost. But that includes overpriced parts and labor to grease the wheels of governance. 80,000 gold—Yes, that is what it would cost without any armaments or inflated labor costs. Armaments can vary greatly. Beyond that…the upkeep, crew, aether crystals…20,000 gold annually to operate.” Wigand’s dreamy look revealed he had researched and fantasized about this.

Wigand’s focus returned to the sale, “Ah well. Ok, a book on creation magic. It is mostly the purview of the dungeons. A dungeon’s consciousness can create organic and inorganic things from the aether. Magi can create inorganic things with tier 5 spells or higher. There are maybe six magi in Skyholme with that type of power. But it is extremely inefficient. Then there are god-class beings. They reside mostly on the 23 moons.” He pulled a hefty tome from beneath the desk that indexed hundreds of titles, and began paging through a particular section. “Here is a good book for your patron, The Complexities of Aether Creationism, A Qualitative Comparison of Dungeon and Mortal Spellcraft. Let’s see. It is available for copying only from the Triumvirate Grand Library, though. Let’s see…48 gold for the copy, adding the tax and transport cost, 55 gold…and my commission,” he looked me in my eye, “60 gold total.” Wow, I had hoped for maybe ten gold, but this mysterious patron was hopefully going to be my cover for other purchases in the future.

“That is easily within her means. How long? And the *cleanliness* spell?” I replied, a little upset that the cost would take me five days to manifest.

“Ah, the *cleanliness* spell. Glad you came to me instead of going to Margold’s shop. I may not be a mage, but I will not steer you wrong. The *cleanliness* spell is common, and there are dozens of variations of the spellbook from which to learn the spell. As with any spellbook, the evolutions detailed within determine its true value.”

I had learned that all spells evolved, basically leveling up. Each evolution allowed changes to the spell framework. You could make a fire spell hotter or bigger, for instance. “The best *cleanliness* spellbook accordingly,” Wigund continued, “is Guidance for Personal Manicuring and Hygiene, The Comprehensive Handbook for the Cleanliness Spell by Archmagi Sana Velin. It has over 250 evolutions and is considered the best reference for the spell. And today is your lucky day, Storme! I know where to obtain a copy. It would cost 20 gold, though, since it is a rare version,” he looked at me, and I nodded. That was much more than the 6 or 7 gold I planned to spend. “The spellbook was in the estate of a war mage who recently lost her life. Her items have not yet been sent for sale, but one of my patrons has a list of the items the family is going to sell, and the book was among them with the buyout price of 20 gold. If I act in the next three days, I can get you the spellbook.”

I pondered, then pulled ten shiny gold coins from my pouch. I can pay for the spellbook in two days and bring a deposit for the other. Will ten gold be enough of a deposit now? So 20 golds in two days?” I asked. Wigand thought for a moment before responding. I added, “She had only promised me ten gold for a spellbook if I completed all her tasks, Wigand. But I am sure Gareth will loan me his ten gold.” It was a patchy excuse explaining how a twelve-year-old could get 20 gold.

“Yes, that should be enough to submit a request for starting the copying request.” He responded after doing the math in his head.

“Ok, when Gareth and Freya get here, have them wait. I have a few errands.” I said as I left. Relieved, I left the shop in high spirits, not even feeling the sore muscles. My next stop was at the pie street vendor I was friendly with. We sold her blue pike to make fish pies, and I got a chicken and vegetable pie at a discount today. My next stop was at the dressmaker. I had placed an order for a light blue dress for Freya two weeks ago and came to pick it up today. Her birthday was soon, and she had repeatedly mentioned she was envious of Gwen’s blue dress. This one should upstage Gwen’s by a good margin. I paid the three silver I had due for the dress and packed it at the bottom of my backpack.

My next stop was the cooper shops. I was looking for a small barrel butter churner. They sold a four-gallon churn barrel that was mounted to a rack with a handle. I wasn’t going to make butter but ‘age’ my coins in it. Once I learned the *cleanliness* spell, I could pretend I was using the spell to make my coins shiny and new. Until then, we should dirty up the coins some. Wigand had definitely been curious about my shiny coins and the mysterious patron.

Well, it was much bigger and heavier than expected, but I still paid the 20 silver coins for it. With some straps, Gareth could carry the barrel, and I could manage the stand. My next stop was the butcher, two smoked hams, forty sausages, and 1 lb of ground beef. I had introduced ground beef to Skyholme, so the product was relatively new, but people had fallen in love with cheeseburgers, so it was available in most butchers now. I then bought some spices in the apothecary for cooking. My funds were quickly dropping. My last stop was the cheese shop for a block of hard-aged cheese similar to parmesan.

Tonight I would make fresh pasta noodles with tomato meat sauce. I returned to the bookstore, and Gareth and Freya were waiting for me. Freya was chewing on some caramel and looked happy. We all went back to the cooper to get the churn. I had to keep deflecting questions about why I had purchased it. But between Gareth and me, we convinced Freya to help us sneak it into the loft in the barn.

Leaving the city, we did see the adolescents that had accosted me last time on the road. They were watching from a distance by the city gates. I pointed them out to Gareth, and he eyed them, burning their faces into his mind. They didn’t make a move on us, but there were six of them now, and I think I remember one of the new ones watching me during my shopping spree.

Well, the trudge back to town was not very fun. Even Gareth looked uncomfortable with the barrel strapped to his back. We had no trouble getting the churn into the loft and were exhausted lying there. I caught Freya trying to sneak into my backpack, and she left us in a huff when I yelled at her, something I rarely did.

Before my parents came home, I was in the kitchen. Freya made the noodles with flour and eggs, and Gareth cut up a light salad. Since I had paid for most of tonight’s dinner, Gareth would be eating with us. Gareth had already brought the sausages to his house and told his parents he was eating with my family. The sausages were his mother’s favorite, garlic, herb, and pork mixture. I made the meat sauce with two types of onions, tomatoes, and some seasoning before adding the cooked ground beef. The noodles were cooked, and the sauce was added on top with thin slices of hard cheese. Mother and father returned home, and soon everyone was eating. Pascal showed up a little late but joined us at the crowded table. There was enough for everyone to have seconds, and we all did.

The small talk centered around the news of the recent skirmish with the Sadian Kingdom. It was rumored that we had lost two skyships in the conflict over control of one of the dungeons in the lowlands. The dungeon had evolved and was producing violet aether crystals in tiny amounts. It was the purest aether crystal, though. It wasn’t so much the fact that we needed the crystals but wished to prevent the Sadians from getting them, according to the rumor.

The Sadian and Skyholme peoples had been at war for the last millennia. We had the high ground, better skyships, and didn’t have to deal with many of the challenges of bordering other kingdoms and beast-filled wilds. ‘At war’ might also be too strong a phrase. There was a major skirmish like the recent one every other year or so. The last major conflict was over two hundred years ago when the Sadians sent over 200 skyships to try and gain a foothold in Skyholme and failed to do so.

The Sadians did have one advantage over us. They had better warriors and more numerous magi. They were also tolerant of other races, the people of Skyholme were humanists, and very few non-human races were allowed to reside on the islands. From my understanding, a few non-human outside traders had citizen status in Skyholme. Of course, the Wolfguard also lived in the capital but did not have citizenship status. From my point of view, the Wolfguard were closer to slaves.

With dinner finished, I retired to my room, and Gareth went home. I was sure he would be topping off his meal with some garlic sausages. I didn’t have to do dishes as I had cooked. Pascal was already working furiously on them so he could go bathe in the river.

Tonight I was going to attempt making a platinum coin. I had a good understanding of the metal from Wigand’s ship today. I tried to do so for the better half an hour. I couldn’t do it. I had enough aether, but as I formed my will to the metal, I kept defaulting to one ounce worth of the metal. I was fairly certain I could do about one-third of an ounce of platinum but couldn’t control the aether investment. I needed more practice and refinement with ability. I was getting overly tired from all the attempts, so I just made 13 gold coins and a little extra gold, exhausting my aether. But I compared the little extra with that of last night, and it was definitely more.

I slept well that night, exhausted and still sore. In the morning, Gareth brought some fig pastries and woke me early. He had talked to his mother, and we could start our lessons with Callem early today. I didn’t match his enthusiasm. I was so excited that I didn’t hide lacing my ‘joyful’ response with sarcasm.

Lessons flew by. Numbers tables, a few questions, and we read and discussed three short ballads. Then Gareth was dragging me away as soon as we finished. I panicked a little as I had left my pouch on my bed with the 13 new gold coins. My family wouldn’t steal them, but if they found them, they might question where I obtained them. I put it out of my mind. We were soon joking back and forth as we walked to the tobacco farm. I was trying to tease him about his exchange with Brianne at the swimming hole. I was curious about what had made her angry, but he wouldn’t divulge what was said.

As we got closer to Captain Callem’s farm, our conversation turned to using the butter churn to age the coins and what we should add with the coins; rocks, metal cubes, dirt, some oil, water… It was an in-depth conversation about how much and what would be best to age the coins. We came out of the woods to see Captain Callem looking at us, and I swear he smiled in anticipation. Gareth also seemed eager to start. U was the only one apprehensive and still sore. What had I gotten myself into?