**Chapter 33 Unfathomable Aether Core**

The next morning I was excited and up early. I only had a few hours of sleep but if I could make a magic device to make ice cream! I was the first one to the farmhouse and was glad to see Callem was back. Wynna was in the larder below so Callem had a few minutes to talk to me.

“Good morning Storme. Yesterday we went and got supplies in the city.” He paused as if coming to a decision and continued, “Wynna has registered as a mentor and set up an account for you with the coins you created. Well, not your coins. She used her own coins and kept your shiny platinum.” Callem took a thick bracelet out and placed it on the counter. “This bracelet will let you withdraw coins from the depository. You need to place a drop of your blood on the aether crystal embedded here to link it to you.” He stopped talking as Wynna came up from below with a tray of food to prepare for breakfast. She saw the bracelet on the counter and gave a curt nod of not being happy about it. They obviously disagreed on whether it was wise to give me access to my own coin. She forced a smile.

“Storme! How was your day off? Callem said you all needed it. Who did you spend your time with?” Wynna was being a bit nosy.

“I just studied, rested, and ate. Nothing that great.” I said. Then I thought of something. “Wynna, Aelyn showed me her reading,” Callem’s and Wynna’s faces expressed extreme surprise, so I paused.

“Wow, Storme. We both warned her to keep what was on that sheet a secret and to destroy it after she read it. She has shown you a large amount trust, A LARGE AMOUNT of trust Storme. Keep her secrets.” Wynna said with sincerity.

“Um, yes I will. I wanted to ask about getting my aether core size read as I am curious. None of my texts mention it in terms of actual numbers,” I asked, keeping my tone low and pleading somewhat.

Wynna spoke, “I don’t have that ability Storme, Ennet does. But maybe I can give you an idea? Well, Storme an average person without an awakened core has an aether count of 1, this is just what saturates a normal person within the sphere. This one point can be utilized for abilities that require aether. As a person ages, they are able to use this minor amount of aether much more effectively, extending the use of their powers but their total aether pool never increases without an aether core.”

“A person with an awakened core usually has between 3 to 23 times that amount of aether on awakening, so their reading score usually falls in the range of 3 to 23 as their current value. As you have probably read, an aether core matures it expands slightly in size and density to fall somewhere between 10 to 20 times its initial size on awakening. That is where the maximum range in Ennet’s reading comes in. With your enhanced aether core at tier 2.” She stopped and looked at Callem with a guilty expression as I had not told her about my aether core tier and Callem thought it was just at 2, not at 4. So I deduced Callem had dropped my secret but I didn’t hold it against him. He did look awfully guilty so maybe I could get something out of him later?

Wynna’s pause ended and was continuing her lecture, “Well each tier is three times as powerful as the last generally, so that means you should have had nine times the average on awakening…somewhere between 27 and 207 in terms of aetheric points available to you when you first awakened.” Wynna said doing the math. Then a shocked look passed her face. “That means when your core is fully mature you will have between 270 and 4140 aether!”

She was shaking her head. “That is incredible Storme. I hadn’t put the numbers together in my head until just now. Archmages without an expanded core ability usually have somewhere in the range of 500 to 1000 I think. I am not sure about that though. I must have read something to that effect a long time ago,” she had a distant look on her face. Then returned to focus on me, “You could try casting a tier one spell over and over and count the castings. Usually, a tier 1 spell uses about 1 relative aetheric point,” she paused pulling up knowledge from memory, “tier 2 about 2 aetheric points, tier 3 costs 4 points, and tier 4 costs 8 points. I assume a tier 5 spell costs 16 but I didn’t read that, just following the progression from a textbook I read many years ago.”

I thought for a bit while helping with preparing breakfast. Callem was silent and not making eye contact with me. Wynna was studying me. No, she was realizing that I might be a monster in terms of my aether core capacity. I thought for a moment, that the last method didn’t work for me in my current state. My *cleanliness* spell varied in aether investment based on how dirty I was. Also, every time you leveled a spell it cost a tiny bit less aether as the mage’s efficiency increased and took a little less time to cast and the *cleanliness* spell was already level 7. My mend flesh spell was sort of in the same boat as I unconsciously chained it over and over until I felt the healing was done. Seeing my consternation Wynna said, “I am sure Callem can bring you to visit Ennet if you really want a reading.” I looked at Callem for a second and I sensed he would say no but then he nodded. I was also doing some more math in my head as I had a tier 4 core which meant my initial core fell between 243 and 1863! And my maximum core would be between…2,430 and 37,260! I was a monster! It now made sense how casting spells had trouble draining my aether pool and I needed to create the coins to empty my core.

Callem spoke, breaking my inner haze of math calculations, “Yes Storme I can bring you to Hen’s Hollow. We can see your family and Ennet while we are there. Your brother’s birthday is just a few days away?” Oh, I hadn’t planned on attending. And the fact Callem remembered when Pascal’s birthday was and I didn’t remember it made me feel guilty. That I could see Freya and my parents made the decision easy for me.

“That sounds good.” I paused for a second running some scenarios through my mind trying to decide if what I was about to ask would be a good idea in the long run. “Callem can I ask a favor?”

Callem looked defensive but nodded so I continued, “My brother Pascal. He has a passion for the blade and for his birthday present, I was hoping he could come out here and train with us for a while. We have a free bunk.” I supplied helpfully.

Callem relaxed as my request was not as bad as he thought it could have been. He thought for more than a few minutes. Probably calculating how Pascal would fit into his training regimens with us. It took Wynna elbowing him not too subtly for him to agree. “Yes, that is fine. Let’s say just for a month.” Ok, I had been thinking more like a week but a month was ok. “And Storme this will be my apology for telling Wynna about…”

I waved away his apology, “No, it is all good Callem. I actually don’t mind at all as I trust Wynna completely.” This actually gave them both smiles and we prepared breakfast in good humor. My motives for inviting Pascal were a bit more selfish. I was thinking if Pascal was stronger then he could help protect our family better. With my wealth and Gareth’s thirst for adventure, I didn’t think I would remain on Titan’s Shield forever.

The others soon came in like ravenous beasts from a long fast and devoured everything we had prepared. I got a stack of blueberry pancakes with butter and some summer sausage with melted cheese from the buffet.

After breakfast, I figured out I had four days before Callem would bring me to Hen’s Hollow. The workouts were just routine for me now as I wasn’t as focused on progressing as Gareth, Aelyn, or Cilia. Leda and I had a similar train of thought, put in a fair effort but don’t kill yourself. The studying of mage craft was where I focused my real energies.

With two days left before we would go to town I finally imprinted my *obfuscate* spell! The spell essentially put a black unreadable haze over my entire aether soul. Wynna couldn’t read anything from me when I asked her to try so it worked! The first evolution of the spell allowed me to reveal only what I choose. For now, that was set to show just my *assess person ability* at tier 1. Controlling this aspect of the spell was like having a mental image of a sheet of paper and covering everything on the page except what I wanted to reveal. For my second evolution, I planned to alter what people reading me would see. Each evolution could only alter one aspect, one line on the sheet. You could turn those alterations on and off independently to either show the truth or falsify it. I was also happy to see maintaining the spell draw so little aether. I didn’t even notice the expenditure.

Before Callem took me to Hen’s Hollow I was able to get the *obfuscate* spell up to level 3. My second evolution was focused on what my aether core size displayed. This was a percentage of its actual so I needed to get that reading from Ennet to know where to set it. Getting my precise aether core size was needed. In my third evolution, I decided to alter what my enhanced aether core ability showed. I decided to show it as a tier 2 rank instead of tier 4. Since everyone already knew I had lots of aether this should give me an excuse to cast a lot of spells in public. With that alteration done I decided I could leave the aether core enhancement ability ‘visible’.

During the walk into town, Callem asked if I knew anywhere that sold chickens. Apparently, Wynna had asked him to get some as she liked fresh eggs and I used them a lot in my cooking. I told him the Gaskill farm had chicks and coops for sale. Other than that I knew the Gyles farm had a lot of chickens as they supplied eggs to almost everyone in town who didn’t own their own chickens. I told him I liked the Gaskill’s better so Callem said we would stop there on the way into town.

The Gaskill farm was large. They had three large fields and raised sheep for milk, wool, and meat. They also had a number of chickens and geese. I saw Monty’s parents, two massive fluffy hounds that came bounding up to us, tails wagging and not barking. I stayed in the background as the Gaskill’s came out and greeted us. I petted the dogs. The Gaskill twins, Meridith and Feradith were there as well. They were my age and had grown since I had last seen them. They were identical twins, blonde, blue eyes, tall and well-muscled from working on the farm. I wouldn’t call either of them cute but they had their own allure, a sort of rough-neck cowgirl look to them and they were always smiling which I found extremely attractive. Something struck me…did Gareth want to get the puppy for Freya so he could see the twins? They would be in our first year of the academy so maybe…

I was lost in thought as Callem was negotiating and the twins moved next to me to talk. They looked the same so I wasn’t sure which one asked the question, “How is the puppy Gareth bought doing?”

“He is doing great! He is with Freya, my sister. He is extremely smart. I think you met her two years ago at the New Year festival. That is the last time I saw either of you! I bet I can tell who is who?” They both had wide smiles.

“Bet? What should we bet?” one of the girls asked the other. The girls seemed to talk to each other mentally before she looked at me and said, “Ok Storme how about we will cook you a meal at the academy if you guess correctly? If you lose you have to cook each of us a meal on different days.” It was well-known in town that I was a great cook so their wager made sense. Although the scales of the wager were not equal I had no chance of losing with my assess person ability so I agreed.

“Sure! Your Feradith and you are Meridith.” I pointed each in turn. Their smiles didn’t waver as they answered.

“Correct! Well, I guess you had a 50-50 chance!” The girls hadn’t lied or been at all upset which was a positive trait in my estimation. Callem called me over and I found out he had bought 20 chickens, a rooster, a large chicken coop, and a large wagon to transport everything back to his farm. The Gaskill’s would load everything and we would pick them up on the way back.

The twin's father called them back to work and they left me reluctantly it seemed. There were about 7 kids on the farm with the addition of the parents and grandparents, 11 people in all. I scanned the large group as they started to work on gathering the chickens into individual cages and caught the twins kept turning to eye me as we were leaving. I was sure once they saw Gareth their interest in me would instantly fade.

Our next stop was Ennet’s. Callem left me there to go get supplies at the general store. I knocked and Ennet was happy to see me when she opened the door, “Storme! I am happy to see you! Are you here to make me dinner?” she asked teasingly.

I smiled and said, “That could be arranged. But I am also here for a reading.”

She grabbed my bicep and rubbed it before gently pulling me inside, “I know! My mother and I have communication stones and she told me you were coming!” I thought she was being a little handsy but that was ok.

“Ok let me see what you have in your kitchen,” I waved off her objections to my cooking. I needed her to do me a favor and doing a favor for her in return was natural. I quickly put together a simple pasta dish with roasted vegetables and an alfredo sauce. After we both ate the hasty meal we were sitting down for the reading and Callem returned. Since the reading wasn’t done yet Callem decided to wait outside but not before taking a bowl of the culinary concoction I had made.

“Storme I know my mother has told you what to expect so I will get right to it. Read the paper and immediately destroy it…I think I might also be able to show you what the value of your core was when it awakened but it will be my first time trying to do that…so that might be on your paper as well.” Ennet was serious as she prepared and then did the reading. I got that uncomfortable feeling as my blood exited my hands to write the text on the paper. Ennet left immediately when she was done. There was a candle burning on the table for me to destroy the paper after I read it.

I revealed the paper to my eyes,

Aether Core Awakening 1,053

Current Aether Core 1,284

Maximum Aether Core 18,848

I immediately burned the sheet of paper. I was a little disappointed with a few facts. First, my maximum aether was only about 19,000, short of my potential 37,000, about half actually. I know I was crying over nothing. My current aether core was already slightly larger than a top archmage according to Wynna. The second thing I was unhappy with was my core had only expanded by 231 from all the practice I had been doing in the last few months. Ennet returned shortly after I burned the paper.

I must have looked disappointed because she said, “Don’t worry Storme. My readings are not completely accurate. Well, your current aether core number is accurate but your maximum core size could be low by as much as 10%. It really depends on how dedicated you are to your training in the next decade as your core cements itself. Aether cores are fluid by nature during development.” She came up and gave me a hug. “You will be an amazing mage Storme, just work hard at it.”

I left, rejoining Callem and we headed to my home for Pascal’s birthday celebration.