

When I sat down again, after experimenting with my new knowledge of Lightning Spells, I realized that I could actually feel the difference. I felt a slightly drained sensation, as if part of me was heavy and yet hollow at the same time. A chill ran up my spine, my body feeling just a tad bit colder than I knew it should be. It was an odd sensation, one that I usually would have confused with depression or at least grief. Now that I had two different topics of magic knowledge, the sensation was easy to identify. I had used a noticeable portion of my mana, and now I was feeling the effects.

Mana was the fuel, or at least the catalyst for almost all magic, and was generated by any creature with a soul. The more complicated a soul, the more mana it generates. That's why, in general, a wolf has more mana than a dog, while neither of them combined had anything on even the lowest forms of draconic lizards. I knew it didn't always have to do with just intelligence, but my knowledge on the subject kind of trailed off after that. While basic knowledge of mana and the soul was understandably low level, neither of my topics had any real depth on the subject.

I did know that constantly using magic would slowly, over time, increase my mana reserves and that using all of my mana wouldn't necessarily be bad for me, but it was not a pleasant experience. People had different reactions to it, but feeling horrifically cold was the most common.

I wasn't even close to that stage, thankfully. Already, I could feel my mana refilling and the sensations disappeared completely in around thirty seconds. As the slight chill disappeared, I realized I would need to test my mana capacity so that I could at least get a general feel for how much I had.

Shaking my head and making a mental note, I once again put aside any future plans for what was important. Letting out another long breath, I refocused on my final three charges.

I was incredibly tempted to immediately buy a second level of Lightning Spells, as the ability to throw around sparks of electricity was... well, it was pretty intoxicating. It was interesting, suddenly having power, and I would need to make a concerted effort not to let it go to my head. I was stranded in a world where a not insignificant portion of the population could do things as impressive or more so than throw around some sparks, after all. Getting a big head already would probably end badly.

That thought finally brought me around and off of the Lightning Spells topic. It even pulled my thoughts away from a second offensive ability. While throwing lightning was incredible, my focus right now was survival. I had a weapon, but now I needed something that would keep me alive, that would let me deal with threats.

I spent a few minutes trying to come up with a list in my mind. Eventually, I got sick of trying to keep it all straight and picked up some sort of metal scrap off the ground, using it to carve into the table. After ten minutes, I had a list of things that would really improve my

survivability. Going through them all, I narrowed it down to three ideas. Stealth, Healing, and Teleportation.

Stealth would let me avoid or escape trouble, healing would let me come out the other side whole and hearty, while Teleportation would also let me avoid and escape danger, but eventually add a level of convenience that would really come in handy down the road.

As I tried to weigh the pros and cons of each option, I realized it came down to how confident I was in the complexity of my choices. If I invested three charges into Teleportation, I really had no idea of what it would let me do. Would I get something actually useful, or would it take more points? I was pretty sure I would get something useful with Stealth, but how useful? Would I get an invisibility spell, or would I just get some spells that help me blend in a bit better?

At the end of the day, healing was my best bet. I had a good general idea of what healing spells were available down the line, from the low-level, mostly useless ones I got from my first charge. I even knew exactly what I should focus on and how to restrict my thinking to really get the most out of every charge. I would invest one charge and see how far that got me.

Closing my eyes, I focused on what I wanted. Rather than focusing on everything having to do with healing, I focused completely on actively casting spells that healed. Once I was sure I had the image of what I wanted firmly in my mind, I invested the first charge. As knowledge flowed into me, I couldn't help but smile at the results.

Rather than building a foundation on its own, as Lightning Spells had done, Healing Spells grew off of the foundation made by the Healing Magic. My understanding of healing spells skyrocketed off the foundation, growing past Lightning Spells with the added boost from the existing investment and the firm grip I kept on what I wanted. When the charge settled in completely, and the knowledge stopped coming, I looked at what I had gained.

I now had a decent-sized library of actually useful healing spells, a slightly more advanced understanding of how they worked, and a much better grasp of the theory behind them. I had at least tripled the number of healing spells I had access to, their quality and potency miles ahead of what I had before.

After reviewing most of the new spells, it felt comparable to what a combat-focused wizard might know, just in case. The spells were a bit limited in flexibility but not effectiveness, and they would work well to keep me alive and fix me back up. It might take a half dozen casts, but they would work. As far as I could tell, this was exactly the level of healing I needed for now. Eventually, I would probably invest in better ways to heal myself and others, but with limited charges on... That would do for now.

Mentally flipping through my spell list, I stood from my chair, stepping away from the table. I closed my eyes and focused my magic, pulling it into both of my hands and spinning it

into several shapes. I knew without looking that my hands would be glowing a pale gold, but I kept my eyes closed.

*"Infunde corpus meum cum sanatione"* I intoned, releasing my mana.

The healing spell swirled around me, bright enough that I could see the golden glow through my eyelids. As the spell advanced, several scrapes, bumps, and bruises from my wild first day faded away to nothing. As they did, I could feel the drain on my mana, a considerable amount since I had definitely gone with a more potent spell than necessary.

I let out a long sigh, enjoying the lack of sore muscles and a refreshed body. I shook off any residual stiffness before returning my attention inward. I was surprised at how much I had gained from a single charge, and as I mentally reviewed my spells and knowledge, it was clear that, for now, I didn't need to invest anymore.

That left me with two more charges, which meant I had a decision to make. Diversify or condense.

I could spend my points exploring other options, maybe picking a second element to fight with or maybe seeing how far a single charge would get me into Teleportation or Stealth. Or, I could invest in Lighting Spells and increase it to its second level.

After a moment of thinking, I realized I had already answered my own conundrum. At this stage, every charge was crucial, as I couldn't spare any power to experiment. I had already messed up with the Healing Magic vs the Healing Spells. I couldn't afford to invest in Stealth or Teleportation only to get nothing in return.

I took a deep breath and mentally reached for the existing topic of Lighting Spells, guiding my two remaining charges into it. The charges sank into the topic like water over dried dirt. Again, my knowledge increased, pushing far past what I knew previously. Suddenly, my head was full of new information, a deluge pouring into my skull. It was difficult to keep track of the new additions as the topic continued to grow and expand. My mental book of lighting spells nearly tripled, and the spells I had before increased in complexity as I learned, in seconds, how to twist, tweak, and modify their casting.

I now knew Lightning Spells as if I were someone who studied it specifically. Maybe not someone who had spent a significant portion of their lives dedicated to it, but certainly someone who was very interested in Lighting Spells and went out of their way to learn about it.

I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding.

*"Minorem fulgur draconem voco pugnare mecum!"*

I focused my mana into both my hands, spinning it into a dozen different shapes, forming complex symbols that spun around the center of my palms. They formed two simple sigil circles,

the first sign that complicated magic was being performed. I then brought the sigils together, causing them to crackle and spark on each other. When I drew them apart again, they revealed a four-foot-long lightning wyrm. It was made of lightning, flowing and sparking as it floated in the air. Once it was completely revealed, it began to fly around the room, looking for something to fight. I mentally directed the lightning construct to return to me, watching as it flew closer, circling around my head.

*Now I was laughing maniacally.*

What an increase in power, from basic to proficient, in only two charges! How could I not laugh and marvel at what I could do?

I dispelled the lesser wyrm with a thought, and I was about to try a new spell when suddenly I felt a shift. I froze as a new charge, one that hadn't been there before, appeared from nowhere. It felt different somehow, more potent. I mentally reached out to touch it, thinking that maybe I would be getting that Teleportation level after all. The second I did, however, it shifted, changing into a topic that I did not select. It had changed on its own, and now I had... Two levels in a topic called Geomancy?

For a long moment, I was too shocked to move, standing stock still in the middle of the room. I had no idea what had just happened. The charge had come from nothing and shifted into the topic Geomancy without any influence from me.

Still standing in the middle of the room, I dove into the new subject, wondering what exactly Geomancy was and why I had suddenly got access to it. My first assumption that it was earth magic was only partially right, but in a direction I hadn't really expected.

Geomancy was the magic of taking things from the earth, like rock, metals, and gems, and using them to infuse other things, yourself, and other people with portions of that material's power. Normal stone was seen to be the lowest form of the art, mostly ignored once you got past the basic levels, which I very much was. Most of the typical metals were just about absorbing their strength and durability, which sounded amazing. Gemstones were the most interesting, able to infuse something with an exciting list of esoteric things. Unfortunately, it had a very harsh limitation.

Geomancy was not for active combat.

Transferring material concepts from a chunk of pure iron to a living person required time, precision, and preparation. It honestly reminded me of what I knew about rituals from Healing Magics. I would need to carve out a specific ritual circle, called Geomantic Partional, in order to perform even basic Geomancy. On top of that, the transfers were only temporary, fading time, anywhere between a few minutes or several hours, depending on several factors.

Despite its limitations, the results, depending on what I could get my hands on, were still impressive. A couple of pounds of steel would make me a brute two or three by itself, and even better, a few relatively cheap gemstones could turn me into a blaster or a striker. Still, it would need some serious prep time and some further investigation.

At the bare minimum, I would need a flat stone surface, pure source materials, and some beeswax. At the higher end, I would also need some gold and a few other expensive materials. Thankfully, since it was two levels already, not only did I know plenty about the process, I also knew several small spells that would help set up the Geomantic Partional. A stone carving spell, a crack sealing spell, and a few other low to novice-level earth and metal manipulation spells.

I let out a long sigh, accepting the new bullet point on things that I needed, just under food, water, and shelter. Actually, now that I considered it, shelter and the flat stone surface went together, since I was pretty sure concrete would work for now. Black slate would work better, as it was magically neutral while still being a natural resource, but concrete would work for now.

I shook my head, clearing out my thoughts again. Food, water, and shelter. I looked around, kicking a piece of garbage next to me, my eyes examining the long abandoned room. This was as good a place as any to call home for now since, as far as I could tell, all of the damage was from vandals, not water or animals. All I needed was something soft for a bed, and I was basically staying at the Ritz.

Since this was technically still a civilized city, my problems with food and water could be solved with money. The only question was how I would earn that money.

I could probably get myself into some trouble, bust some heads and maybe find some cash in a Merchant house. It was a staple of the setting, after all, and while I wasn't dumb enough to think it would work for long, the second level of lightning magic went a long way in shifting my confidence in taking on some goons.

The Geomancy could, hypothetically, make me bulletproof as well...

I shook my head and cursed, kicking the floor again. I had been here for less than two days, and I was already considering Merchant hunting as a realistic way to get some quick cash. Sure, I could mitigate some of the danger with the proper Geomancy ritual, but that was hardly the point.

This world was a fucking curse, and it was already affecting me.