

“Look at Angelina Johnson go. She veers off to the right dodging a bludger from Eric Hilton, and punches the quaffle past the Ravenclaw keeper into the ring. Angelina scores!”

The stands roared in approval as Angelina punched her fist in the air celebrating the goal.

“Gryffindor leads with 70-20.” Jordan announced excitedly.

“Just three more goals to go, then you’re up, Harry.” said Angelina as she hovered near him on her broom.

“I got it covered, captain.” said Harry, giving her a small salute.

Angelina rolled her eyes, aligning her broom to focus better on the Ravenclaw team as their chasers took possession of the quaffle and went on the attack.

“Just keep Chang away from the snitch. We need the extra points to make sure Hufflepuff is not going to snatch the cup away at the last moment.” said Angelina before speeding away on her broom.

Harry pulled his broom going straight up, keeping himself far away from the space of chasers and beaters. Unlike a game with Slytherin, he didn’t have to worry about the beaters taking potshots at him so long as he was not making a move on the quaffle or the snitch. The ravens played a fair game without committing fouls. Or at least, they tried to. Occasional fouls happen, but they were rare when the ravens played the game.

Harry waved cheekily at Cho once he came level with the Ravenclaw seeker. To the credit of Cho Chang, her focus never wavered, and she kept her eyes out for the elusive snitch. However, Harry was pretty confident he saw Cho roll her eyes at him. Pulling himself further up, Harry searched for the tiny glint of gold hiding somewhere on the quidditch grounds.

Taking a deep breath, Harry closed his eyes and focused on gathering magic into his body. Ever so slowly, he managed to cover his body with a thin layer of magical energy in a protective shield. His intention was not to use his power to create a shield that’d somehow repel any physical attacks. Instead, it was one of the tricks he learned from the book Perenelle Flamel gave him to increase his sensory talent. The trick was to create a barrier of magical energy that’d slowly be released as tendrils or wave patterns. Using the wave pattern usually yielded better results, but Harry was not in a war zone. He only needed to find a measly golden ball.

Therefore, Harry chose to spread his magic out as tendrils. Harry opened his eyes and started spreading a web of magical energy around him. Amusingly enough, infusing his will and a little bit of Leglimency into magical energy was one of the basic principles of mastering *Protego Diabolica* that decimated the Giants. The same principle had immense application in mastering magical sensing or Mage Sight, as Perenelle claimed. Although, the real Mage Sight was quite different as it involved augmenting the visual prowess of a wizard or witch. But that particular skill was the product of years of honing a wizard’s sensory perception.

For a moment, Harry thought silly for using what was arguably a prodigious magical skill to find the snitch in a quidditch game. Then again, it was a good training exercise as any. After all, he could not hone his skills if he didn't train with his magic every day.

While his eyes kept track of the game the chasers were playing, small tendrils of his magic extended outward as if casting a giant net over the pitch. He dared not try to encompass the entire stadium as there were professors sitting in the stands like McGonagall and Flitwick. While he did not have a higher opinion about their character, Harry had no trouble acknowledging their magical skill and years of experience in different disciplines of magic.

Suddenly, Harry noticed Cho speeding away on her broom past him at high speed. He could not help but frown as Harry was sure the snitch was not in the direction the Ravenclaw seeker was going.

'Either she is attempting a feint, or she must be mistakenly going in that direction.' Harry thought.

Instead of chasing after Cho, Harry turned his focus to his right side. There he could feel a fast-moving object in his mind's eye. Unfortunately, his eyes trained on Roger Davies, the Ravenclaw seeker. He frowned and moved closer towards the chaser to get a better view. His eyes picked up a glint of gold hiding near the tail of the broomstick of the Ravenclaw chaser. He kept his eyes on the snitch, and strangely enough, it was content to closely follow Roger Davies throughout the game.

Harry bided his time until Gryffindor reached 100 points on the scoreboard while closely keeping his senses honed on Davies and the snitch shadowing the guy. The moment Katie Bell scored the goal that put Gryffindor on 100 points, Harry made his move. He flew straight up and blasted faster than any player on the pitch, thanks to his Firebolt. Out of his peripheral vision, he could see Cho trying to catch up to him. Abruptly arresting his momentum, Harry laid low against his broom and forced it into a steep dive. His eyes were closed, but he knew where every player was on the pitch. He forced his broom to spin as he dived and made it veer sharply off to his left. When Harry opened his eyes, he could see a golden wing of the snitch peeking out of the tail end of Roger Davies' broomstick.

Within the blink of an eye, Harry executed a barrel roll as he dived past Davies' broom while reaching out with his arm, plucking the snitch from underneath the broom. The snitch helplessly beat its wings, but Harry had a tight grip on the little bugger.

The stands erupted in cheers as Harry raised his fist showing off the snitch in his hand. Madam Hooch blew the whistle signalling the end of the match.

"We did it!"

Alicia screamed as she slid beside him on her broom, giving Harry a one-armed hug. Soon, the rest of the team surrounded Harry with bright smiles.

"That's it, Harry. We now have to beat Hufflepuff, and the cup is ours." Angelina said, grinning from ear to ear.

“Don’t worry. This year the cup will be ours.” Harry promised.

The celebration in the Gryffindor common room was quite enthusiastic and lasted into the night. The celebration was also augmented by the fact that despite the many hurdles placed by Umbridge, the Gryffindor team was near winning the quidditch team. Their team was already 80 points ahead of Hufflepuff in the run for the cup. Since Hufflepuff had only one game, and that was against them, Diggory would have to catch the snitch from the beginning. There was the Slytherin-Ravenclaw match, but he doubted that match would produce any radical changes to the points as it stands. After all, Slytherin was in the last position with the lowest points, and Ravenclaw was not doing much better with their recent loss.

It was pretty much confirmed that the Hufflepuff-Gryffindor match would settle the Quidditch cup for this year.

Someone tapped his shoulder, and when Harry turned around, he found Neville.

“It’s time.” Neville mouthed.

Harry nodded and quietly sneaked out of the Gryffindor tower with Neville and Hermione in tow. With the aid of Dobby, they quickly arrived at their destination, and Harry wasted no time in setting up the Room of Requirement. The secret passageways were immediately created from the room towards three different parts of the castle. Once the passages were formed, Harry immediately sent the messages for the meeting to select medallions connected through the Protean charm.

Within five minutes, all the new recruits from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin were assembled inside the room with the entrances fading away.

“Hey, Harry. Good game.” said Cho Chang, standing close to Cedric Diggory.

“We had a good game. It was fun.” Harry replied, smiling at the Ravenclaw seeker.

He was happy to see Cho Chang was quite happily holding hands with Cedric Diggory. Harry considered saving Diggory from an untimely death as one of his best achievements of last year.

“Hey, you. I thought there would be no meeting because of the celebrations in your tower.” said Tracey, waving at Harry standing beside Daphne.

“Hi, Tracey. This is more important.” said Harry, walking closer to the Slytherin group and giving a small peck on Daphne’s cheek despite her glare.

A few teasing whistles came from the gathered crowd, but Harry paid it no mind. Although, he was pretty sure he was going to get an earful from Daphne for his overt public affections.

“Don’t worry, Daphne. Harry is under the influence of Wrackspurts.” Luna said dreamily.

There was a brief moment of silence before suppressed snickers could be heard in the room. Harry stared at Luna as if she had betrayed him.

“Wrackspurts?” Tracey asked, with an amused glint in her eyes. “Tell me, Lovegood. What has these Wrackspurts done to Harry?”

“Wrackspurts are invisible creatures that love to float through your ears and make your mind go fuzzy.” Luna said, looking rather happy she could share what was ailing Harry.

“You hear that, Harry? You’re having a Wrackspurt problem.” Tracey giggled.

“Very funny.” Harry deadpanned before turning away from Luna and Tracey to address the gathered students without wasting time.

“Thank you all for promptly coming. So, let’s start with the shield charm today. Sixth years and seventh years are encouraged to do it silently.” said Harry, splitting the gathered students into two member groups.

Hermione and Neville were assigned to keep an eye on the fifth, fourth, and third years, while Harry focused on the sixth and seventh years.

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Dolores Umbridge was going through a tough time in Hogwarts and at the Ministry. She was ostracised and alone in the Ministry, with the Minister ordering a detailed probe into her every action since she stepped inside the hallowed halls of Hogwarts. She knew what Minister Fudge was doing. The man was saving face while giving her a last opportunity to turn the situation around by coming up with something substantial to change their fortunes. But she knew whatever advantage she could summon by unearthing any of Dumbledore’s crimes would be useless as far as she was concerned.

After everything that happened, the Minister could ill afford to keep her as his undersecretary. The aurors, under orders of Amelia Bones, had ransacked her office and captured several blood quills. Among the captured quills, the one she used on the little mudblood boy was recovered. Some of her informants in the DMLE informed her of this fact. No doubt, Madam Bones also knew she knew, and yet the woman was perfectly content on sitting on the ‘evidence’ of her supposed misdeeds. Dolores knew Madam Bones was a political creature through and through. The woman was keeping the investigation under her watchful eyes and keeping everything she learned in reserve to use it against her should Delores ever try to reclaim her rightful place in the Ministry.

‘I don’t begrudge that, as that’s what I would have done in Amelia’s place.’ Delores thought.

She could live with being bested by a skilled and respected pureblood woman like Amelia Bones, who rose to lead the DMLE through hard work. However, she could not stand to allow an arrogant, entitled brat like Potter to get away with destroying her life and political ambitions. The half-blood Potter brat was a danger to the Ministry. She knew it, and anyone with eyes could see it. It was unfortunate that Minister Fudge was so blinded by the threat of Dumbledore to see the rising threat of Potter.

Again, she could understand what poor Cornelius was under. After all, Dumbledore had masterfully pulled off a grand heist by breaking out the former Death Eaters from Azkaban to put the Ministry under pressure. Going by the undercurrent whispers she had heard from the Ministry, Dumbledore's plan was working. The mass breakout with newly discovered dead Death Eaters made the Ministry look incompetent before the public eye.

The Ministry was now focusing on keeping the public docile. At the same time, Dumbledore and Potter were free to act against the Ministry with their next evil plan, all in the pursuit of overhauling the current administration. To make matters worse, the Ministry now had to worry about Potter's rising magical power. Before, they only had to worry about Dumbledore's magical power. But now...things were different. She had to admit it was quite a blow to her pride to learn that the Potter brat had dismantled experienced aurors like Dawlish quite easily. But the reality was reality, and she had to face up to the fact that the Potter brat was magically powerful enough to be a threat on the same level as Dumbledore.

Not only did the Potter brat show off his power before the school and humiliate the Ministry, but he also managed to considerably clip her powers in Hogwarts. She could no longer assign detentions, award points and take away points inside Hogwarts. If she wanted any disciplinary actions taken, she'd have to take permission from the Deputy Headmistress. All her Education Decrees were null and void per the new deal inked by the Board of Governors and the Ministry of Magic.

Umbridge scowled as she thought she was in the exact same position as Severus Snape was in last year. She was under 'probation' and under greater scrutiny by the Board of Governors, Headmaster Dumbledore, Potter and every enemy she ever made in the Ministry. One wrong step, and she was done. At this point, all her efforts should've focused on keeping her head down and quietly retiring to avoid any further repercussions.

'I won't quietly go into the night and cede victory to the Potter brat. I'll have the boy dealt with even at the cost of my life and career.' Dolores promised in her mind.

Her only ally in Hogwarts was the squib caretaker Filch. There were good Slytherin students who saw the threat posed by Potter, but they were few and quite useless.

'I don't need anyone's help to catch Potter and Dumbledore. I need time to properly plan and set a trap for them both.' Dolores thought.

First, she needed to find the weakness in Potter and Dumbledore. They both must have some weakness; once she found it, she could use it against them. Then, she could rid them both and help the Ministry create a perfect lawful magical Britain bereft of half-breeds, mudbloods and filthy creatures.

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It was the last week of February, and the classwork of all fifth-year subjects began piling up over time. The frequency and depth of assignments only progressed as days went by towards the end of the term. The OWL exams were slotted to start on the first week of June. There were precisely three months for the exams to start, which meant Harry and Daphne had two months to submit their completed project in Ancient Runes. Then, there were all the other preparations for taking the practical tests for the OWL exams, along with the theory part. While practical tests were something Harry was confident he could breeze through, the theory part would need a lot of preparation and effort from his side.

Therefore, Harry took it upon himself to collect all previous question papers from the library and use them as practice tests. While repeated questions were most likely rare, he could familiarise himself with the question pattern. It was not as if there were any significant syllabus revisions for OWL exams in the last hundred years. Madam Pince was kind enough to give him all the copies of the previous OWL exam papers for his chosen subjects.

With most of his time spent on developing lesson plans for the Knights, Harry had to rely a lot on Hermione to tidy up his preparation for taking on the previous OWL question papers. Once he let Hermione know that he planned to study the previous question papers to familiarise himself with the question pattern, Hermione was enthusiastic about taking up a good portion of the effort and improving upon his idea. That was how he ended up facing a large pile of neatly folded solved previous year's question papers in his hands.

"You solved all of them in one week?" Harry asked, staring at Hermione, impressed.

"Well..." Hermione abashedly. "I had Neville's help for Herbology."

"I barely helped. She already knew most of the answers." Neville helpfully added.

"This is surely going to be a lot of help, Hermione. Maybe, we could make several copies and share them with our group. With DADA going to the dogs this year, they'll need extra help to pass the theory exams. Umbridge's book is as good as donkey dung." Harry suggested.

"That's a good idea. Maybe we could do the same for NEWT-level students as well." Hermione said excitedly.

Harry exchanged a look with Neville.

"We could perhaps ask NEWT-level members of Knights to pitch in. A joint effort from their end would be much more beneficial." said Harry to forestall Hermione from taking up NEWT-level coursework when they were already burdened by OWL exams.

Hermione was a little bit let down, but to their relief, she agreed that it'd be better for NEWT students to work out the previous questions themselves.

That day when the sun came down, giving way for the night, Harry pressed his wand against his heart as he always did for the last few months and muttered the incantation; *Amato Animo Animato Animagus*.

Harry stared at the skies, unimpressed, as there was still no sight of an electrical storm. He felt like it was a giant waste of time to pursue the animagus training. It was simply becoming too much trouble in his eyes.

Therefore, it came as a surprise when Dobby suddenly popped into the Chamber of Secrets late into the night while he was working on the Horcrux spell.

“Master Harry. There is been a storm, sir. Dobby saw it, sir.” Dobby said urgently.

Harry’s eyes widened, and he immediately asked Dobby to take him to the designated spot he had prepared for this eventuality. It was a small spot inside the Forbidden Forest, and Harry immediately put up wards to keep out any unforeseen visitors. Sure enough, Harry could see an electric storm brewing in the sky.

“Kreacher.”

“Master called Kreacher.” the old Black elf croaked, teleporting in with a pop, looking rather annoyed to see Dobby beside him.

“Kreacher, bring me the Mandrake leaf potion Sirius had you keep safe.” Harry ordered.

Kreacher popped away and immediately returned with the potion in hand.

“Thank you. Tell Sirius that I’m drinking the Animagus potion.”

Kreacher popped away, leaving Harry and Dobby in the small clearing.

“Is Harry Potter sir going to drink it, sir?” Dobby asked, looking worriedly at the potion and then at the thundering skies.

Flashes of lightning arced through the night sky while thunder shook the earth. Winds gained speed, and heavy rain began to pour down from the sky.

“Yes, Dobby. I’m going to drink the potion.” said Harry, bringing the potion vial near his lips.

Taking a deep breath, Harry drained the potion in one go. After he ensured that he had drained every last drop of the potion from the vial, Harry dropped the vial. He could feel something shifting within him. His perception was somehow affected as he could feel his natural senses expanding. His ears were getting more sensitive, as was the case for his nose. He was expecting pain, but instead, he felt like he was getting an unholy strength in his limbs.

Raw emotions like the urge to dominate and the feeling of all-encompassing strength dominated his mind and instinct. Suddenly, Harry found himself somehow moving at high speeds. Raw power and speed were what he was feeling at the moment, and these feelings made it difficult for him to concentrate. Trees passed by as Harry waded through the Forbidden Forest as if he owned the place.

At one point, he came across a bunch of giant spiders.

‘Acromantula.’ Harry thought.

He wanted to take out his wand and blast them away, but instead, he opened his mouth and screamed. Or was it a roar?

Harry came to the startling realisation that he was roaring at the spiders, and they were scared right out of their minds. They screeched and ran away as fast as their many legs could carry. He clamped his mouth shut and slowly moved towards a cliff. Bright arcs of lightning could be dancing in the sky, and under a particularly powerful flash of lightning, Harry saw his giant paws and the golden mane on his body.

'I'm a lion.' Harry numbly realised.

The skies rumbled with thunder, and Harry roared to the heavens as if challenging the heavens themselves.