

The Bigger Picture

cloud9stories

The Bigger Picture

by *cloud9stories*

POV from a OC-SI one year older than the twins, AU from triwizard onward, even if Harry Potter will be canonish. Detailed explanation of magic, animagus, alchemy, rituals, Worldwide scenarios.

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1. Awakening

I OWN ONLY MY OCS,

This is my first attempt at SI-OC Harry Potter Fanfiction. As I said in the title, my character will focus on the worldwide threat: the inevitable failure of the Statute of Secrecy and the following failed attempts at integration between the magic and mundane worlds. More than that, he will focus on magic.

He will mostly leave Harry Potter and his friends to fend for themselves until Triwizard, from there on it will be AU.

There will be magic theory, elemental understanding with elements from Naruto, alchemy, rituals, and Crafting of various kinds. I hope you enjoy this story, but I do not really care. this is really going to be some kind of sandbox for me to play with magic.

I don't really think I will put lemons in it, because quite frankly I don't think writing what the MC thinks about anal sex is character building. There is a fuckton of smut out there if you need to wank, use a bloody porn site.

I'll write what I can, when I want, so there it is.

P.S.

I said it on my profile already, but I shall repeat: suggestions and constructive comments and reviews are welcome. If you don't like what a character does or does not, save yourself time and don't tell me since the characters will do what the hell I want them to (that's the whole point of fanfiction).

If something doesn't add up feel free to tell me. Especially if magic doesn't make sense! I want the magic to keep its wonder, but while paradoxes can exist, absurdities like Fate or Death or

miracles aren't acceptable to me. So if something comes out as such, tell me!

I hope you enjoy my work, and please consider supporting me at:

cloud9stories dot net (you'll find the link proper on my profile, for some reason ffnet doesn't let me publish it here)

On my site there are available pdf versions of all of my works, which can be downloaded

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

Chapter 1:

Awake

The first thing I can recall properly, or my first memory, is feeling somewhat confused.

This was for a lot of reasons: I was no longer twenty-two years old (at least judging by my pudgy hands, blurry vision, and the attention span of a mosquito), other children were roaming around, the adult people around me were clearly not speaking my native language, and I was enthralled by a bright orange wood cube.

Don't get me wrong, I normally don't despise orange, or wood, or regular geometrical 3-D objects, it's fascinating, really, but before this first memory of me in a little body, I am quite certain I was just about to submit my thesis for my Bachelor's degree in Physical Engineering. Thereby my confusion.

It most definitely was not a dream, simply because if you can think about being in a dream while you are sleeping, it's really easy to

distinguish it from reality. At least this has always been something I could do.

My confusion was slowly subdued by my rising panic.

WHAT THE FUCK!?

I was almost hyperventilating, and boy isn't that something stupid to do? The other children would notice something was wrong with me, as would the adults, and I would find myself in some secret military lab being dissected for some reason or another. Maybe I was overthinking it.

Obviously, this chain of thoughts was not helping. A sudden crash caused me to stiffen. Raising my eyes from the fascinating orange cube I could see the window's glass had cracked and was missing shards. I couldn't explain it, but some part of my mind recognized that I was the cause of that event.

Oh, so I AM a military experiment. I thought.

Because seriously, what else could it be? Going from being 22 years old to a toddler around other toddlers with telekinetic mind powers triggered by panic? I was clearly a child-soldier to be.

But the adult in the room squealed in fright, before ushering the children away from the window.

Following a gut feeling, I spent the following hours crying and blending in with the other children

No adult praised me or in any way recognized what would [should be] be a success for their military development.

Maybe I was a failed project?

So, in conclusion, it seems like: I was a twenty-two years old telekinetic almost engineer in the body of a toddler, and it looked like I was not under observation.

If history or comics of any kind have taught me anything, it is that revealing yourself to be somewhat different without being in a position of power is madness.

So, keeping it secret it was.

2. Answers

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

Chapter 2:

Answers

1987-21 December

Repeating in my head what that woman just told to me, I had three thoughts running in circles in my head:

- 1) well this explains a lot of stuff
- 2) how the fuck did I end up here?
- 3) what the hell should I do now?

Scrutinizing Minerva McGonagall, who curiously, actually looked exactly like Maggie Smith, and was smiling somewhat smugly, I simply asked: "I beg your pardon?"

At which she equally simply repeated "You are a wizard, Mr. Taylor."

I stuttered something unintelligible.

Well this explains a lot of stuff. I thought again.

Taking my shocked stuttering and stillness as something related to her revelation, the professor briefly explained to me in words an eleven-year-old could understand about magic.

My response to this was to push my palms into my eye-sockets trying to process the fact that I somehow ended up not only traveling

from 2019 to the past, like last years of observations had led me to believe, but in the fucking Rowling universe. *Nice books, by the way.*

However I read enough fanfics in my, well, I'll call it my first life, because either I suddenly died there to awaken in some kind of parallel dimension or the real me was in a coma and this was all a super hallucination.

I didn't know which of the two options was worse than the other.

Well, the latter was out of my control, the first was my childhood dreams come true.

A first very important step was determining if this place was exactly like Rowling's world, or, if not, which were the differences.

I grabbed a notebook and pen, and I was glad I still new shorthand writing from university.

I took a deep breath: "I have a few hundreds of questions, professor. Can I ask the more pressing ones?"

I know it's not exactly respectful, but she looked like a cat that ate the canary, somewhat smug, somewhat grinning.

"Yes, Mr. Taylor, I have the whole afternoon free exactly for this very reason."

And so I proceeded to ask, from the details of the Statute of Secrecy, to those of the magical government, and to what kind of magic was actually possible (her answer to this one was 'almost everything, Mr. Taylor'. *useful, really useful professor*). If Atlantis was real, if Greek or Norse mythology characters were real or based on wizards and witches, if dragons were real, if there was magic on the other side of the moon (this question made her look at me strangely, so I dropped the outer space questions), and so on and so forth.

"Why have you come today, exactly?" I asked last, and to this, she explained that traditionally, the day in which a wizard or a witch turned eleven was the one dedicated to sending the Hogwarts' letter to those already aware of magic, but that since I was muggle-born and living in an orphanage the deputy headmistress was in charge of explaining the magical world.

During this, I learned that my legal guardian would be my Head of House once I was sorted.

"Since you were born after the 31st of October, you will start attending Hogwarts coming September first. If you choose to attend, obviously." and there she raised an eyebrow, like my answer was somewhat taken for granted.

So, I would exist in legal limbo until September first? I couldn't decide if it was advantageous or terrifying.

"And what would happen, if I were to refuse to attend your schooling?" I asked then. The professor raised both her eyebrows looking at me like I would look at a giraffe in a suit: with a 'Strange as fuck, but not really my problem' gaze. She studied me for a few seconds before her non-answer came: "Why for the love of Merlin would you choose to not learn magic, Mr. Taylor?"

"Because I am an avid reader of dystopic novels, professor," I answered coldly. I never liked the not answers nuns used to give me in primary school (of my first life).

At this point she was scrutinizing me, it was obvious she had no idea of what I was talking about. (I read lots of stuff in my previous life, but Fahrenheit 451 was among the orphanage's books, so I was in the clear. No need to talk about things that did not exist yet)

"You would not be able to get a wand, you would have to carry a tracker, and the memories of today would be erased. We must uphold the Statute, after all."

Well, it could have been worse, I guess. I thought briefly.

I could refuse, and keep learning stuff on my own, after all, I learned how to levitate stuff without help. And once I gained enough as a muggle, I could buy stuff on my own and stay away from mind-reading fuckers, and generally off the grid.

But, well, it was magic, and I really wanted to throw lightning around. I also had years of RPGs in my head, I could steal ideas and craft spells that only muggles would imagine in the 2010s.

New plan. Becoming so kickass that the ministry, Voldemort and Dumbledore can do what they want leaving me the fuck alone. And building a muggle proof floating island because it would be super awesome, and magic. Learning All the magic, becoming immortal too would be cool, I think.

"I'll be glad to attend your fine institution ma'am." I responded, "but how will it work? I am already attending a muggle school, and there are things I'd like to keep studying, and getting a degree at some point would make it possible for me to work for muggles and magicals alike. Also, what am I supposed to do until September first? And is there some kind of student loan? I don't have any money."

The witch relaxed a bit at this point, "Hogwarts will house and educate you from September to June, what you do during the summer, Mr. Taylor, is your business. I suggest self-study, and you can sit your examinations as a private citizen. Now, the papers for dropping muggle school will be taken care of by the ministry, and we can go on and purchase some of the equipment on your list, it will be second hand, mind you, and you will not attempt to cast spells or brew potions until you are at Hogwarts, is that clear? Good."

I was nodding and jotting down everything she told me since I made [gave] her the first question, so she let me finish noting the rules and then offered me her arm. I knew she wanted to apparate us, but it was an argument [topic/magic] we did not cover with my questions. I stared at her arm tilting my head a bit. "Is this some kind of salute?" I

asked then, mimicking the elbow-goodbye from Frankenstein Jr. (I remembered it was from 1974, even if I wasn't counting on her knowing about it).

She quirked a smile, I must have appeared as a strange, paranoid, curious child, "No, Mr. Taylor," she said while grabbing my arm "we will be apparating."

And with a crack, we were gone.

The leaky cauldron was exactly like in the movies, even if they missed the smell of stale, alcohol, and foods that I didn't want to think about. But that was probably because it felt like I just got squeezed through a rubber straw, and I was trying very hard not to puke, while rubbing my arms to warm myself somewhat.

It's winter you old hag! I thought. She didn't even let me grab my jacket, I just had on a jumper for god's sake.

"Yes, the first time can be somewhat uncomfortable, I'm afraid. Oh, allow me." and before I could think of an appropriate snarky remark she conjured a cloak from thin air, and with the second twitch of her wand, I was suddenly warm.

My head was processing both the things she said and the things I read in my first life, so my mouth was free to throw questions at her: "When do I learn to do that? Where was it before you made it appear? What's your wand made of? What's this place?"

"Mr. Taylor!" she interrupted me, "calm down, we have a couple of hours to complete your shopping, and so I have time to answer your questions, but only if you let me."

Yup, now she was stern and amused at the same time, this was my magic at work.

I followed their trough the brick wall (trying to memorize the sequence), and I did not comment on the name Diagon-alley

because that was the kind of humor I wouldn't poke with a ten-foot pole.

After she explained that the questions I expressed had answers too advanced for me, she went on for a bit explaining the different classes I would be attending, but her eyes sparkled when I presented particularly insightful questions. She [seemed to actually love to teach. That was cool.

"Professor, since I am on a budget, why can't you make clothes appear like the cloak?"

"They would disappear once my magic fades, Mr. Taylor."

"If I buy a rat, a toad, or an owl, will it become my familiar?"

"Not at all. A familiar bond is developed by chance, and it's the peak level of trust between you and the familiar. It's not something you choose, more something you are chosen for. It's an esoteric branch of magic, and not something I've ever studied."

I ended up with a good oak trunk, if a bit scratched here and there, my clothes were a couple of sizes too big for me, but I would wear them coming September and lots of second or third-hand books. I chose to buy more of them, used, instead of fewer, new.

Among them there were An introduction to runes: futhark and Norse, even if I had to promise not to try anything before taking the class in Hogwarts, Arithmancy for beginners, even if McGonagall was skeptical of whether I would understand it. I made it clear that I wanted to challenge myself.

McGonagall helped me with choosing a few more, like A history of the Wizengamot, The three steps of the duelist, Fantastic Beasts and Where to find them, Magical theory: volume one, An introduction to alchemy (Written by our own Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore), and several others that piqued my interest.

For the potions class requirements, a pewter cauldron was purchased, however, the ingredients were yet to be bought, due to the short shelf life that they have even under preservations charms, and at the Magical Menagerie I found a robust-looking barn owl that kept following me with his little black eyes that shined in the middle of the white feathers of his face.

"And, for your eyes, I'll name you Kurotsuchi, it means Black Earth, in Japanese. Do you like it?"

Hoot

"Good enough for me." I grinned.

As we walked out of the shop in response to the odd look I received, I explained to McGonagall that I wasn't fluent in Japanese, I only knew a few words and how to count up to ten.

I was about to ask if there were spells to learn a foreign language when we reached Ollivander's. My expectations [going in] were obviously very high: did he really use only phoenix feathers, dragon heartstrings, and unicorn hairs? Or perhaps parts from every kind of magical creature? After all, if Fleur could use a Veela's hair, I was pretty sure that it was only chance that made Ollivander mentioned only phoenix, dragons, and unicorns in the books. Maybe they were the more common cores?

We entered the dusty shop and I immediately felt almost like I was underwater, but not quite, maybe like I had clogged ears due to the shift in pressure, but even that wasn't it. I raised my hand in front of me expecting to feel some kind of resistance, but it moved normally through the air.

"Good Afternoon." a voice piped in behind us.

I jumped a bit, startled, even if the fanfictions should have warned me about his spookiness.

"Minerva McGonagall, fir and dragon heartstring, ten inches and half, with a taste for transfiguration."

"Yes, Garrick, like you always remind me. And stop making my students jumpy, if you please," replied McGonagall. I almost laughed at her somewhat weary tone, he seemed to love his little charade.

"And you are?" he then asked me.

"David Taylor sir, it's an honor to meet you." I answered, still somewhat overwhelmed by the blurry quality of the air that I couldn't explain.

"And which is your wand arm?"

"Uh, I learned to write with my left, but then I learned to use my right hand too, and sometimes I draw using both, so I don't know how to answer sir, and now I'm rambling and so I'll shut up, sorry professor."

I almost stuttered at the beginning of the conversation but as soon as I started imagining how it would feel to hold a wand, I once again became enraptured by the feeling of the very air around my hands. McGonagall actually smirked at my answer, while Ollivander hummed for a few seconds, sending his measuring tape around my face, where it took note of the length of my nose, my eyebrows, the distance between them, the width of my mouth, before it went around my back and snaked around my arms, fingers, and even legs and feet.

"A sensible one, aren't you?" asked Ollivander. I remained silent since it was obviously a rhetorical question.

"This could take a while, Mr. Taylor, wandlore is a curious branch of magic, and not even I understand it all, however, I have an interesting feeling about today, oh yes. And when it comes to wands, mister Taylor, feelings are everything." He took a breath, starting to rummage among the dusty shelves "However it's clear, that no witch

or wizard chooses his or her wand, but rather it's the wand, that chooses its first wielder instead."

Then I started trying wands, first with my left, then with my right.

"Pine, with a very old Ukrainian Ironbelly heartstring, exactly 13 inches, stiff."

I slowly raised it with my left, feeling a tingle from my wrist to my elbow, encouraged, I waved it toward my left: boom, and gone was the vase in the corner.

The flowers inside were dead anyway. Even while thinking that, I put down my wand feeling a bit guilty.

What if the stuff I was doing will prevent me from using a wand? Actually no, Riddle used wandless magic growing up and his yew and phoenix feather still chose him.

"Whistlethorn, with a Snidget tail feather, ten and a quarter inches, rather bendy." I felt a zap stopping at my fingers there and waving it again towards the vase' shards I caused them to embed themselves into the wooden wall. *This answers my question on the materials he uses.* I thought belatedly.

"Eleven inches of mahogany, with a single Nundu's whisker, very springy."

That one burned my fingers before I could do anything with it.

Ollivander went on giving me sticks to wave around for a full half an hour with varying degrees of success, before humming some more.

He then slid a trunk on the floor before jumping inside, muttering something unintelligible.

I forgot they could do that!

"Professor when will I learn how to craft a suite into a trunk?" I asked immediately, excited at the thought of this magic.

The professor almost smiled there; I swear.

"It's an advanced application of charms and runes both, that requires a perfect understanding of the arithmancy behind the project. It's not something actively taught at Hogwarts. In your sixth year I believe the expansion charms are briefly touched for your charms NEWT. And no, Mr. Taylor, you don't need a newt, it stands for Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Test. And you can read about the exams in both Hogwarts: a history, and History of magic."

And before I could find another question for the professor Ollivander came out of the trunk.

I still don't understand why people need to work if they can live in a trunk and conjure clothes. I thought briefly, in my mind, it truly didn't make sense.

Ollivander aligned four wands on the table, and we were at it again. "My uncle liked to experiment with composite cores, these are the wands that didn't explode, Mr. Taylor, they are mostly safe."

I stopped before grabbing the first. "Mostly?" I asked, eyeing the wands a bit wary.

"Well, yes!" exclaimed Ollivander, "He was a bit batty you see."

THAT should reassure me?

I stalled for a few seconds, because I wanted to live forever and have fun, exploding for a wand crafted by this a bit batty person would suck. I extended my hand over the first, trying to prod it with the feel I usually adopted to, well, feel stuff that I could either push, pull, or levitate. I breathed deeply, letting the feel washing over me. Or trying to.

It felt like hovering my hand in the open mouth of a lion. Thrilling, but scary as fuck.

The second one gave the same feeling you have when you walk in the absolute dark with only your hands to guide you. *So, explorative, I guess?*

But I didn't like it one bit.

The third one felt like climbing a tree and snorkeling at the same time, like spring rain and building a sandcastle. *That doesn't make sense at all. But I like it, even if it is strange.* It reminded me of the focus one falls into while resolving a math problem, and the adrenaline rush before the first 'I love you' when you don't know if the other feels the same. I slowly wrapped my fingers around the length of wood, and raised it from the cloth on which it was resting.

The rush ran along my left arm and exploded in my chest, and somehow, I knew I had to hold on with all my strength, while my heart started to boom in my ears. And so, I held on for dear life, because I was running on the edge of the blade, I was a kite, prey of the winds, I was a rock assaulted by the waves. And slowly the waves calmed down, the string of the kite fell into my left hand on its own, and I was walking on grass still wet from the dew, among safe, strong trees. It was like the grass wanted to soothe my feet after the run on the blade. When I finally remembered to breathe I was laughing with fat tears running down my cheeks. I brought my wand close to my eyes. Because it was my wand, and I knew it in the same way I knew my lungs were in my chest. It was a light brown wood, almost gray, and the texture felt almost like stone.

I was taken from my contemplation by McGonagall who seemed unable to control her Scottish burr while reprimanding Ollivander for the risk he exposed me to.

"Thank you." I interrupted her. I was looking at the old wandcrafter who was sporting an almost predatory smile.

"A bit batty, young wizard, a bit batty." he reminded me.

And I swear he was somehow howling in laughter while maintaining a straight face.

"A wand chooses the wizard, Mr. Taylor. Exactly thirteen inches. Demiguise eyestrings wrapped around a thunderbird feather. I read in my uncle's journal, that while the female Demiguise got herself captured at almost the end of her natural life, the thunderbird gifted her feather willingly. That would make for an extremely temperamental and uncontrollable wand. But the wood is from a spruce. In particular, from the Old Tjikko spruce tree, which is quite venerable. You see, that spruce tree is more than nine thousand years old, and once or twice every millennium, the tree dies before sprouting again from the same roots, which are always alive. A bit batty does not quite cover your wand, Mr. Taylor, but the potential is there. Oh yes, it is." explained slowly Ollivander.

"I cannot pay you enough for this master Ollivander." I whispered. I was still looking at my wand. The handle was welcoming, I distractedly noticed that my whole arm was still aching from how strongly I held the ancient wood, while the upper part was almost sharp, like a splinter.

"My wands cost 7 galleons, Mr. Taylor. Nothing more, nothing less." Ollivander dismissed me. "However, maybe I can interest you in a proper wand maintenance kit, or a wand holster?"

I looked at him with the most deadpan expression I could execute: "I'm eleven years old. How exactly my 13 inches long wand is supposed to rest on my forearm?"

Ollivander rose a challenging eyebrow at me, before letting his creepy wide eyes roll around the shop, resting on the trunk he had gone into to retrieve my wand.

I wanted to kick myself: "Right, magic. Nevermind." I paid 2 galleons extra for a wand holster, but I left the wand maintaining kit alone, if

the wood was from a nine thousand years old tree I could simply treat it well and see where it would bring me.

3. year 1-2

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

1988-01 September

I reached the platform 9 and 3/4 without issues and with time to spare.

Once I settled down in an empty compartment, I unsheathed my wand, still enraptured by the feeling of being complete that it gave me. Since my birthday in December, I had spent each day doing exactly two things: trying to understand how to make things happen with magic channeled through the [my?] wand, and reading ahead in preparation for my first steps in the world of Harry Potter. Each one of the books I purchased was interesting and challenging in its own way. Even if the one on dueling was a bit useless if not for the notes scribbled on the margins, (really, a whole chapter to explain that the best way to react to a spell is almost always dodging? what a waste of paper). The suggestions, however, presented well-trying spell chains, so I couldn't really complain.

The real surprise had been alchemy, which is basically chemistry on steroids with superpowers. Now that, was not something I had ever read about in either canon or fanfics. The critical part was that knowing about protons, neutrons, and more, only helped to understand the theory behind the processes explained in the book. I quickly understood why it was that not everyone and their mother were alchemists. That shit was hard. Everyone knows and understands that matter is either in a solid, liquid, or gas state of aggregation. Each had very definite and understandable properties. However, The point in which someone passes from knowing about alchemy and performing it is the critical and nebulous one. Because it's not just your mind that has to understand alchemy in order to perform it, oh no (that would be too easy), it's both your mind and

your magic understanding and working in concert to coerce a transmutation into the world.

The book came to a conclusion with some guided exercises about vaporizing water through heat or pressure variations. I had tried them in April. With the wand, I managed to infuse heat into the glass of water without too many snags, but when I tried the change of pressure variation, the glass shattered, and the water turned to snow. After that, I chose to leave it alone for a while. I couldn't manage to make it work wandless.

The other books all kept the promises given by their titles, and I basically already self-studied through the end of the first year's curriculum. That is, at least on the theoretical side.

Managing to use my wand required a bit of an effort: until the end of April, she kept zapping me more often than not, every time I tried to channel magic through her. And yes, referring to my wand as a she was strange as fuck, but I noticed that the more I considered it as a living being, the less contempt she holds toward me. My wand was a complex one, and Ollivander could have at least attempted to explain what the bloody fuck I was getting myself into.

With a sigh, I took off my shoe and put it on the seat in front of me. Slowly, since I didn't want to ruffle the thunderbird part of my wand for something so inane as a levitation charm I could perform endlessly, I swished and flicked, uttering "Wingardium Leviosa." And with a whisper of something running through me, the shoe rose steadily into the air. It didn't even attempt to kick up a fuss. But after all, it was my shoe, so maybe it was already attuned to my wishes? Magic sometimes didn't have well-defined rules, and it made sense, because it was, in fact, magic. And if it could be exactly described in numbers and equations this second life would have been a letdown.

I sighed a bit. While I could perform almost all of the first year syllabus, I still had no solid ideas that could explain why. Why the hell some gibberish in an approximation of proper Latin would be magic words? Why an apparently random movement of my arm and

wrist channeled magic just in the specific way would exact my will on reality?

I let my confusion briefly disrupt my focus, and the shoe fell with a twirl in the air. I looked at my wand with an arched eyebrow and a spark shot forward from the tip of the ancient wood. And it felt like... smug amusement?

Temperamental indeed. I thought.

The first time I held the wand, she tested me, almost rupturing my heart. Ever since then she outright ignored my will or twisted my magic just to spite me. It took a month of daily attempts of entering in synch with her for the first positive interaction to arise. And the wand felt like a she. It somehow made sense, since both the demiguise and the thunderbird that the wand was comprised of were females I had to be respectful, careful to not spook her, and that slowly made the demiguise part of the wand used to me and the feeling of my magic. Whatever magic actually is. My perseverance turned the open disinterest of the wood into quiet acceptance, and I believe those two components of the wand somehow convinced the thunderbird side to accept me.

More than a tool, it was like the wand wanted to be understood by me, by my magic. But it was also almost like the wand attempted to understand me as well. *And now I sound like a strange cross between Ollivander and Castaneda.* "A bit batty, uh?" I murmured.

The more I grew used to the wand, the more readily it seemed to answer to my will, even if it never gave off a feeling of enthusiasm. I blame its thunderbird side for that. Thus, ever since April the trouble was no longer about proving myself as worthy of the wand, but convincing her that the spell I was trying to perform through her was worthy of her contribution. In short, my wand wanted to be cherished, and if I was not absolutely certain of my actions, she would either ignore or outright oppose me.

At least the legal limbo in which I had been until I landed on the train let me practice without the ministry breathing down my neck. *And if nothing else, this behavior solved my loneliness problem.* I reflected again, feeling the wand warming in my hand. Because obviously being twenty-ish among toddlers had been an agony even with my powers to explore on the side. Still, being now thirty-ish among eleven years old could be arguably worse. But hey, I had magic and a sentient wand, so it would be tolerable.

McGonagall had been surprisingly entertained by Fahrenheit 451, and thankful for the muggle glossary I had written on the side of the pages. I gained several tips for transfiguration and a lot of suggestions about stuff that muggle-born would never think about. Maybe I could ensnare Flitwick in the same way.

Now recapping the steps and rules for the Great Plan to Live Long and Happy:

- 1) Stay away from all the Harry Potter stuff
- 2) Become so kickass that Dumbledore, Voldemort, and the ministry would only wish to leave me alone
- 3) Find a peaceful way for immortality

This translated in the short term with something like absolutely abusing the Room of Requirement for:

- 1) Learning occlumency
- 2) Crushing every academic record and abuse a time turner from my third year onward
- 3) Completely comprehending this wandless magic (a wandless Patronus is a must)
- 4) Stealing all the stuff in the room of the Room of Requirement
- 5) Learning actually useful magic, like expansion charms and wards

All this while having fun on the side. Because, what's the point of living twice if you don't enjoy your second chance?

My sorting had been smooth, and I ended up in Ravenclaw, because the other houses only develop pussy-footers, suicidal heroes, and sociopathic people. In this house, a loner great at magic would be left alone, and that was wonderful. Even if the hat didn't like the idea of being part of an imaginary world.

I found the Room of Requirement after my first week.

I need the best place where I can learn occlumency

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There, I found a cozy room with a tea table on which rested three books and an armchair. *Awesome* I sat down and started reading.

To my great dismay, I learned that occlumency was illegal unless you were a cleared member of the ministry: someone high ranking enough, like an auror or an unspeakable. The government didn't seem to like the idea that commoners could keep secrets from the ones leading them. The law was from 1789, and if I were to find a plausible cause for it, I would say the French Revolution. It made a lot of sense.

I also soon learned that I wouldn't be able to build an impenetrable fortress in my head with impossible defenses, because an occlumens was a wizard, or a witch, that could do stuff while being in a certain state of mind. Meaning that an occlumens was someone who wasn't thinking about anything, or that was so supremely focused on something that he didn't think about anything else. That was some difficult shit. While apparently in contrast and opposites, both styles should be developed together, because doing so makes someone used to the shift in focus necessary to handle an occlumens's state of mind in the day to day life. It kind of reminded

me about the mind magic style in the Inheritance Cycle book trilogy by Paolini. But it made some kind of sense, and it wasn't like I would find a proper teacher anytime soon, so I didn't exactly have a choice. A single universal method for developing occlumency did not exist, since every mind is different and should develop its tailored brand of mind arts.

Soon enough, I developed a sound routine which allowed me to cover all the points of my plan.

After waking up I read for a while a random book from the library, writing down on my personal Great Parchment of The Interesting Things, spells or new topics of research. After breakfast and the morning lessons I attended lunch, while trying to isolate a single voice from the chaos around me, and at the same time ignore all the others. Or trying to memorize every detail of my half-full dish, taking a bite, and trying to superimpose my memory to the now different reality. That was a way to sharpen my focus while remaining aware of the world around me. It should also be possible to adopt the mindless repetition of lyrics of any kind, but it didn't work out for me. Music was far too distracting and captivating, it would summon emotions, images, and the like, as such, it didn't work for me. Eating while performing said exercises helped develop my ability to multitask, and the point was exactly that: doing something without really thinking about it while you were focused on something else or nothing at all.

I attended my afternoon's lessons, and then went to the Library to research this and that. After a fast dinner I went to the RoR to experiment with wandless magic, and with dueling every other day. The fact that for every two hours spent in that room only one passed outside was a wonderful boon. Since I didn't want to reveal the existence of that fantastic place to anyone, I asked every time for a different exit, and I usually got lost every three days.

After the first month of almost religious practice, occlumency somehow clicked, and I knew when I was doing it right. I started then to practice the doing without thinking part of it every time I could.

Trying to picture my consciousness as a circular pool of crystal clear water, I started walking from a [one] class to the next while being in that elusive perfect state of complete and relaxed awareness. Performing it while sitting still in a lotus position in a silent room is very different from performing it while walking around. Either my Zen vision of the world kept failing, or I started finding myself hyperaware of the feeling of my arms that brushing against my sleeves, or emerging from my absent-minded state only to find myself standing still in front of a wall, or a closed door.

My getting lost soon became a running gag for most of my house.

My little classmates, bless their little greedy hearts, were kind enough to steer me in the right direction more often than not, since my presence of mind returned for every lesson and I gained more points with my academic performance than the ones I usually lost being around after curfew because I didn't realize I was roaming the castle.

Besides, my wand would have backfired if I ever attempted to use her without giving it my all. The prefects started to recognize me and docked only one or two points, because they knew I wasn't doing it on purpose, and they would find me roaming after a few days. My absent-mindedness became famous when McGonagall threatened to transfigure me into a clock because I arrived late to her lesson and I asked her to be turned into a pocket watch because I didn't like the idea of being a longcase grandfather clock.

If I wasn't absolutely terrific at magic, I would probably have assumed the Looney title. The next step, once I learned to achieve the no-thoughts state of mind, would be recognizing the elements that disrupted the equilibrium of my crystal clear puddle of water. Those would either be my own thoughts, caused by my Zen perception of the world slipping, or ripples caused by an external influence. Hence why, on the 22nd of April I was found myself in front of my Head of House's office. I entered the room when the wooden door opened, and I found myself staring at a model of the solar system floating near the high ceiling

In particular, the Sun was a perfect fireball. Not like my failed attempt to cast the Forbidden Sun from DS2 earlier in the week. The flames always lick upwards, it's physics, heating air travels from low to high because of her intrinsic density and the flame followed that movement. Not that fireball, oh no, the flames flickered radially on the sun's surface.

The planets each had all of their moons in the correct positions (we looked at Jupiter's moons on the 19th), I noticed that Mercury was faster than Jupiter in their elliptical orbits, after Mars, there was a belt of sand and.. ice crystals? All those elements made me think that even if they didn't know about the Apollos missions, wizards were not exactly hopeless. On my left there were shelves full of books that formed aisles impossibly deep, on my right a mirror that didn't reflect me and that I suspected was a door to a mirror dimension ready to swallow me (thanks, to many fantasies I read in my first life). I moved nervously out of the way only to almost crash into a pyramid of dueling trophies and awards of various kinds, before almost planting my face into... a floating parchment that was writing by itself?

Seriously, I want this office. A light cough took me away from my musings and when I looked forward, I completely ignored my amused professor in order to stare at the fire that rolled, twirled, and danced in the copper brazier engraved with runes.

"That's Gubraithian Fire." I blurted out.

"Indeed." laughed Flitwick "And how can you tell?"

"White and blue flame, no heat, no smoke." I explained analytically. "And there is no way in hell a normal magic fire [would] laughs in synch with you, sir." I added honestly. *I want to do that. I need to learn that. RoR I'm coming!*

"Aptly put, Mr Taylor. However, 10 points from Ravenclaw for inappropriate language." the charms' master merrily replied.

"And what else do you know about Gubraithian Fire?" he asked then.

"Gubraithian Fire, also named The Eternal Flame, is the expression of both absolute mastery over fire and perfect understanding of one's own magic." I spoke quickly "It's not about casting an ever-burning fire, even if it that can be an application of the magic involved, it's basically the representation of your own life force. And Being able to cast it means that you could theoretically extinguish rampaging Fiendfyre "

"And 15 points to Ravenclaw. I wouldn't have been able to explain it better myself. Having said that, do not cast Fiendfyre only to be able to see me put it down. It's not something to play with, Mr. Taylor." the light tone of the professor made it clear he was joking and didn't actually think me capable of it.

Even if...

"Your efforts in learning occlumency are commendable, however, every wizard should exercise caution in their thoughts, occlumens or not."

Ugh, busted in my first year. That's underwhelming.

"Are you going to let the ministry arrest me professor?" I asked then, I was sad, really, but hopefully, the thunderbird would enjoy going down with a, eh, let's say a thunderstorm. My wand was, surprisingly enough, almost eager to let loose. It would have been an activity to add to my routine: every three days, destroy stuff in the RoR.

Before I could attempt my escape, the diminutive professor spoke again: "Why would I? Mr. Taylor, I remind you that it's only illegal to teach occlumency. Or to possess books that explain it. Those are objects that, if read, can teach this particular branch of magic." The half-goblin then showed me a predatory smile.

"I have no idea how you stumbled upon the Mind Arts, since I happen to know that there are only books about memory charms into the restricted section. And I know you didn't wander there. I have no interest in stopping your studies, I often try to encourage my

students to broaden their topics of research. I fear, however, that you are biting off far more than any human is capable of chewing, Mr. Taylor."

And went on ignoring my attempt to protest. "You are studying almost a whole year ahead of your peers, self-studying runes, arithmancy, alchemy and occlumency." Rattled off quickly the charms monster.

Because seriously, pulling off a Gubraithian Fire, that shitload of enchantments and keeping such a close eye on every one of his students was just monstrous. I was aware that I wasn't anything special, so if he knew that much about me it was because he knew that much about every one of his Ravenclaws. "I'm flattered, Mr. Taylor." added then.

aaaand he was reading my mind, yep.

At that point I stopped looking him in the eyes.

Those fucking minds reading shiny dark eyes.

"A sensible precaution." he then added.

"Isn't against the law using legilimency against a minor, professor?" I asked coldly. I didn't know if it was true, but someone could only hope.

Oh, I was totally angry. Fuck that I was furious. I actually liked him until yesterday! *How dare you!* In that moment the air smelled like ozone and I noticed an electrostatic discharge running between the tip of my outraged wand and the floor.

"Not only you are my ward until you hit 17, but can you prove I was reading your mind?" the fucking mind reader asked.

Without waiting for an answer he continued: "And how would you know you are doing it right otherwise?".

The electricity ran up and down my left arm, without hurting me.

The wand felt... approving?

What the fuck!?

I thought about it for several seconds, running our conversation in my head.

"You can't teach occlumency." I then repeated dumbly.

I was watching the professor's chin, so I saw him smirk.

The little fucker!

"You should also learn how to school your expression, Mr. Taylor."

I scowled some more.

The little fucker actually laughed!

1989-01 September

I ended my first year with flying colors, but that was hardly a glowing success.

I had, after all, already studied almost all of my syllabus even before attending school.

Since then, the connection with my wand only improved, and the focus trick I learned for occlumency made my magic flow better through my sentient wooden stick, while directing my intent outside my wand was either a slow application of will (for my transfigurations) or an almost ferocious battle in which I had to contain myself to keep a disarming charm from becoming an 'I-take-away-your-arm' charm.

I could now 9 times out of 10 change the state of water from liquid to ice only through changing the pressure. Following the feeling of the

change of an autonomous cyclic process in the RoR had considerably shortened the understanding part of the process for my magic. Seriously, that Room was an overpowered feature of the castle. And yes, I could obtain the same end result with an aguamenti along with a gladius, but the point was learning alchemy, not the sixth year syllabus. I didn't know why, but I supposed there was a reason for the order in which we learn spells

Occlumency steadily improved too. Since May I had started noticing Flitwick poking around in my head, while I scowled or answered with focusing on the feeling of being a drop falling in a black lake of nothingness in response. That mental image helped me to clear my mind and the half-goblin started to wink at me signaling his approval.

When I was strolling in Diagon Alley, purchasing my stuff with the money sent to me by McGonagall, I went once again to Ollivander. I thanked him once again for my wand that I openly praised, earning a cool shiver of pleasure along my arm. The wand was preening?

I wasn't even surprised anymore.

On the spur of the moment, I asked: "What do I have to do to learn wandcrafting?"

Ollivander watched me with a glint in his too-big eyes that I could not really interpret in any way, before answering mysteriously, as only old wizards do: "Learn to listen, then try to talk. After that, come again and we will see if you can learn how to sing."

Seriously what the fuck is wrong with old wizards? My wand strangely chose to stay silent.

1989-last week of June

My second year had been very similar to my first, only with the first appearance of the Weasley twins to who ended up as expected in Gryffindor and Cedric Diggory to in Hufflepuff.

I really couldn't be bothered enough to care.

Flitwick liked 'The Little Prince' book I gifted to him for Christmas, and was thankful for the little handmade muggle glossary I added to the envelope made with old papers that talked about Neil Armstrong.

For McGonagall I prepared a yarn ball and 'The origin of the species' by Darwin.

Both books had been stolen from a library in London, but they didn't need to know that.

I learned a bunch of detection spells because the last thing I wanted was to show the Room of Requirement to the Twins.

I could empower my nose enough to distinguish my own sweat from the one of the others, and that was a terrifyingly good feat of transfiguration for a fourth year, I was in my second. Sadly, there were too many dung bombs, everywhere. The twins would need a few years to grow in finesse.

I asked McGonagall about permanent transfiguration. I completed a project to turn my glasses into heat visors with a combination of charms and runes. I used the Norse set, one was the symbol for dawn, the other for sight-understanding. While a system of two runes was hardly stable, at least speaking with the relative arithmancy in mind, the charm that bridged the two stabilized the set and was meant to behave like a circuit, activating the charm made the magic flow through the construct. I used arithmancy to analytically predict the result of seven wand movements and made up a gibberish-Latin incantation that would match the rhythm of said movements. That spell turned the inanimate object of exactly 90 degrees on their axis, clockwise, unless you changed the third movement with a downturned swirl. That modification made the object spin counterclockwise. I studied the laws that regulated the crossbreeding of magical creatures and stole several raven eggs that nobody cared about. I strung up a friendship of sorts with Hagrid and started getting up at 5 a.m. to help him with this and that on the Hogwarts

grounds. During the year I ended up trying to read the future with an old deck of Tarot cards provided by the Room of the Lost Things, and from time to time I sent a letter to that drunk that taught divination reporting my readings and asking for guidance. I experimented a bit with potions, trying to come up with faster or cheaper ways to do what we would then do in class. I mostly failed but researching why I failed ended up giving me a leg up from time to time both in potions and herbology. After a lesson I asked Professor Sprout how to grow an independent forest ecosystem in an enlarged cave.

When I was sure enough of my occlumency that I could keep it up while fighting against bludgers in the RoR, I asked Flitwick to teach me how to duel. He refused, but somehow, I had the feeling he was expecting me to prove myself. I wondered if it was possible to use occlumency to develop the ability to multitask to a point in which it was possible to think about several separate things independently, but I assumed the risk of creating a split personality was too high and abandoned that line of research. I started to learn how to origami following a book, and I managed to animate a paper swallow to flap its wings. It still didn't fly.

After asking the nurse what was necessary to learn to become a healer, I started studying human and mammal anatomy. Since May, I sent letters to every one of the professors (but Snape, Dumbledore, and Quirrell, who was teaching muggle studies) asking all different questions on a variety of magical topics.

I showed my projects to each of the electives' professors asking every kind of question I could think of to help improve them. I honestly think I surprised professor Vector with my new spell, and questions about the relation between wards and mathematical systems with several algebraic unknowns. Kettleburn liked my idea to teach ravens how to talk to relay messages by voice.

The year ended without happenings worthy of any particular note.

4. year 3-4

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

1990-01 September

In the middle of July, Kurotsuchi flew in my room with a letter from my Head of House, which informed me that arrangements had been made so that I could attend Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, Runes and Arithmancy as my electives.

Timeturner!

The owl did not like that I had kept two little ravens in my room for all the summer, he was probably cranky because I asked him from time to time to bring in a rat for them, but I had no intention of spending any money that could be used for my books on something like owl-treats, or proper feeding for ravens under one-year-old. I had a few more galleons than the previous years and I was able to purchase battered copies of the needed textbooks (seriously, the notes on the sides were lifesavers, I had no idea why anyone would pay more for a copy without them.),

And I managed to squeeze in a second-hand copy of *The Great Book To Take Care Of Your Book*, which contained more than a hundred tips about book care. I didn't know why anyone would waste time writing such a book, but then I thought about Madam Pince, and my doubts vanished. A third hand, but well-maintained copy of *Weather Charms For Every Occasion*, which was the stupid, unknown brother of *Mastering the Sky*. Of the latter, less than a dozen copies existed in the world and it was obviously on the Ministry's blacklist. Also, a very battered copy of *Treasures from the hunt: a guide*, found its way in my hands. That book promised to teach me how to properly render animals. If nothing else, it would cross the path of my studies on mammal anatomy. I also purchased

an old book in what looked like Japanese, but for 5 knuts I would buy anything.

However, wary of cursed books like Riddle's diary, I would ask Flitwick to examine it, since books capable of eating my soul or my face actually existed. I also took note to research if there was a spell to translate stuff, or if it was possible to magically learn a language.

For my talking ravens project, I managed to gain permission from professor Kettleburn to use a room in one of the towers that he warded so only I could enter it. It was bare, but I did make do with furnishings from the room of the Hidden Things.

It would have been cool cleansing and using Ravenclaw's Diadem, but that would mean throwing the plot out of the window, and that was a big no-no, at least while Dumbledore was around.

The time turner was a curious little thing, it could bring me 7 hours and 47 minutes back in time at once, before needing 13 hours of cooldown period.

And it couldn't be used to 'live in a loop': meaning, that even if I used it to time travel 144 minutes into the past (after that jump for some reason it only needed 49 minutes of cooldown time) I couldn't use it to jump into a time where there were already two of me around, nor I could end up in a time before I used it for the first time in that day.

And if I wanted to stay alive, I couldn't directly interact with myself, meaning I wouldn't be self-dueling or using legilimency on myself to practice and test my occlumency.

From what I had been told, if my magic or bioenergy was to interact with the magic or bioenergy of the past me, the time turner would collapse into the void taking me with it. It would have been a very complex form of suicide through violent vanishing. The arithmancy that explained it would probably be a nightmare, but I wasn't really sold on the whole 'you can't interact with your past self'. After all, in the Prisoner of Azkaban, Hermione thought she recognized herself,

she tossed pebbles at Harry and witnessed his future self conjure a Patronus that saved both him and Sirius: the more I thought about it, the more I believed the rules and regulations I was told to follow and respect existed to prevent me from abusing the time-turner. The only reason Hermione had given Harry to not interact with his past self was 'that he would believe himself to have gone bonkers'. If I planned for it, why would I go crazy if I were to meet a future me?

'Interactions with the future/past me' was soon scribbled on my ever-growing Research List.

The little book Flitwick gave me explained only the rules of time travel and the time turner limitations, I actually had the freedom to use it as I pleased inside of these limitations.

My conclusion? Hermione Granger had been an idiot. Why the fuck would anyone jump back to live again the same hour?

I traveled with a parchment upon which I wrote with a pencil to keep notice of when I was, and I kept a ledger in my private project room in which I wrote down both the times and the movements of my first time living each day. I kept my usual routine, only, instead of going into the tower after my stop into the RoR, I asked for an exit near to my private room, in which I would then enter, compile my ledger of the day, before rearranging my notes of the day, completing the assignments given that day, and revise the ones due for the day after.

All of this happened with me reading out loud and explaining to the ravens what I was doing. I was hoping they would pick up a thing or two here and there.

Waking up at 5 am to accompany Hagrid on the grounds every single morning was murder on my willingness to stay alive, but he was so happy to talk me through whatever he was doing that stopping would have hurt his feelings and broken my heart. But I was honestly learning a shitload of stuff. And he told me about Fluffy.

Maybe I would even meet him! Them? Whatever.

I usually ended my work around 9 pm, then jumped back around 1 pm, in time to attend the 2 pm double runes period on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday, I attended arithmancy from 4 pm to 6 pm, I would then hide into the astronomy tower for the nighttime lessons.

At night, I always slept like the dead, since I had 31-hours long days. When I wasn't attending lessons (while being back in time) I ate snacks, slept, or read light stuff to my ravens, who were trying to croak their first words.

I did enlist the house-elves' help, and Moppy was a lifesaver. She either reminded me of the time, made sure I ate and properly slept, or had my naps when necessary. All in all, I lived an interesting year.

For Christmas, I gifted to my Head of House 'The Time Machine' by Wells, which I stole from a library the previous summer exactly for this occasion. For McGonagall I stole 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' because I had a feeling that she would get a laugh out of the magic cat. I had painstakingly carved a wooden flute, like the one Tumnus uses in Narnia, and a set of runes made it play a lullaby when touched with a wand. It was as long as my forearm, after all, it was my gift to Hagrid, and it had to be proportionate to his size.

I received 'Elemental Transfiguration: magic or myth' from McGonagall, it was a book as big as my chest, and it had her fucking annotations on the sides! *Throwing around thunderbolts!* I loved her.

'Unraveling the charmed: a study on light shape manipulation' was the almost literal bomb gifted to me by Flitwick. *Illusions!* I loved him.

He also gave me back my Japanese battered book, having judged it safe. *Uh, I had completely forgotten that.*

I somehow suspected that they were competing against each other, but hey, all the better for me. Those books were not something that

could be found just anywhere, and with their annotations, their value was incalculable, at least for me. I was happy that they would survive the canon story without my help.

Hagrid, bless his giant heart, gifted me a knife as long as my forearm. It was made of bone, or horn, it was straight and had a side like a saw, while the other was so sharp it shaved the hairs off my arm. The hilt was an engraved raven, and the leather on the handle was comfortable. It could do with a pommel to better its balance, but for Hagrid the thing weighed nothing. It was a greatly appreciated gift, because one should never go around without a knife. I would need to ask Hagrid from what beast it did come from.

The professor took it away from my hands and left it in Hagrid's care, he would teach me how to take care of it and how to properly use it during our mornings together. I would be able to take it away from Hogwarts once I was 17 years old.

Party poopers.

1991-01 September

The results that came to my room in the middle of July had confirmed what I already knew: I was a kickass young wizard. My understanding of how magic actually worked confirmed a few of the ideas I had, based on the shitload of fanfictions I read in my previous life, and threw others out of the window. Incantations are a trick to make the mind associate a particular intent to an effect generated in the world, with enough repetition your magic would learn to answer to the incantation even with minimal focus. Wand motions, of any kind, 'yank your magic' around and your intent shapes it into a result.

The British magic system was a mess of wand motions that didn't make sense. A magical core does not exist. Powerful magic users are so because they understand what change they are shaping; they pour all of themselves in that change. So, truly powerful magic is akin to an act of faith in both yourself and the change you want to

bring into reality. So, with enough time and focus, I could create a spell on the fly without an incantation, along with wand movements that simply felt right. Enough repetition would turn that long process into something that I could do in an instant and with barely a thought.

Souls were very real, and animism was a thing. Stones resist very little to a transfiguration, a plant a bit more, a nonmagical animal even more so, all the way toward magic users. It's actually easier to transfigure an eleven-year wizard, more so than any niffler or devil's snare. That would be because the sense of self of magical animals is absolute. Meaning that all they are, and have, is their magic and their body, without a distinction between the two. A hippogriff flies because of its magic and its wings. There is no way in hell a beast weighing 4 hundred kilos can flap its wings and actually fly.

Let's say you wanted to transfigure a rabbit into a raven.

Having an exact knowledge of the rabbit's anatomy was useless, on the other hand, knowing the anatomy of a raven did help somewhat. The transfiguration process wasn't the combined change of a lot of minor, little transfigurations. You did not actually change a mouth into a beak, paws into talons. Rather you changed the physical representation of the rabbit's soul. It was easier to turn a rabbit into a flying raven if you cast your spell mid-jump.

A Wand directed your intent, imposing your soul's will over the will of whatever you were changing. In Transfiguration, the understanding of the raven (which was the end result) was more important than understanding the rabbit. The feeling of the feathers, the playfulness of the flight without worries, and the sharpness of the beak, were elements you should keep in mind. Knowing how the bones were disposed of helped building the image in your head, but was ultimately less important than the result you could see. It would be easier to transfigure a snake out of a gust of wind than out of thin air. Conjuring stone is very difficult because you bring out the stone-ish side, the stone aspect, of the air: the unyielding property of an unrelenting gale.

The serpensortia spell bypassed that part because it included a lot of wiggling in its wand movement: you changed the wiggling into the slithering of a snake, and the step from there to the actual reptile was easy. I had seen enough discovery channel in my previous life that I could conjure every kind of reptile with a very similar wand movement.

So, wandless magic could only bring into existence little changes. Moving around stuff that weighed less than you? Easy peasy. Why your weight is relevant? Because physics is real, even in a world of magic, and you naturally have a rough feeling of the effort you should naturally exert to move stuff around. Cutting curse? Easy enough. Summoning fire? Doable (even if it was conditional on your familiarity with the element). Throwing a lightning bolt from your hand? Forget it, even if it was possible to manage giving someone a nasty shock with a touch. Guiding a natural lightning bolt to fall on a target? Easy. Notice-me-not charms and other compulsions? Impossible. Wrapping shadows around yourself and hiding into a dark corner? Difficult, but doable. Manipulating Dragon-Fire? No chances in hell.

Wands were absolutely overpowered tools because they connected the you-soul to the world-soul and redirected the world's latent will into your intent. The wand core connected you to the wood that was connected to the world, because wand wood remembered better than other tools what it was like to be a part of the whole, while the core remembered better what it meant to be alive as an organic construct with instincts, wants, fears, linking easily with the human wielding the wand.

So, in short, wands were soul/will-bridges. With all of this in mind, alchemy wasn't something that everyone and their mother were able to do, because transmuting changed the soul of what you were tinkering with. So, to recap, spells change the tangible representation of the souls, for a time. Transmuting crafted a permanent change. The World did not like that, so transmuting shapes was doable if you knew what you were doing, permanently

turning stone into steel required a shitload of energy. And that was why, in alchemy, after shape manipulation, naturally came energy redirection. Redirecting kinetic energy was the first step, heat the second one, changing one into the other the third one. And finally turning one kind of energy into another while directing a part of it into a transmutation.

And when I say that the World doesn't like permanent changes, I don't mean to say that the world is sentient and aware of everything, like some pantheistic god. It's more like the world has an inertial force that would break whatever transmutation you attempt to do unless you compensated for the changes with energy of some kind.

Maybe all the Narutoverse nature chakra manipulations were an alchemy trick? RoR here I come! I felt I was on my merry way to become a true alchemist. Now that I thought about it, it was likely that Dumbledore was a Transfiguration Monster because he studied alchemy under Flamel.

Now even with my personal Magic Theory, I still had no idea how the fuck I would craft a Philosopher Stone, and I only had a very blurry understanding of sacrificial magic and rituals, all of which was based on my foreknowledge of the events of the Potterverse. Often I was lost in my musings, caressing my wand like usual. Each year she felt more at ease with me: the venting sessions in the RoR attuned me with the thunderbird, who also appreciated me being busy. My endless and yet paced pursuit of knowledge appeased the wood, while my generally relaxed state (thanks occlumency,) helped in not spooking the demiguise, who was also appreciative of me not feeling under scrutiny.

In the summer I wrote to the Divination professor about a dream in which we were using mirrors to see a reflection of the future. To Flitwick about enchanting mirrors and creating pocket dimensions into those. I asked McGonagall about transfiguring light into the reflection of a mirror to create an illusory knight inside of it and then using conjuration to bring it across the mirror into reality.

Yes, I wanted to see the mirror of the Erised, and that was a very Slytherin way to go about it, but I did the same to obtain a time turner, displaying my interest in each of the electives. But The mirror was a shortcut to the Patronus, so, I wanted to see it. I was now in my fourth year, and Harry Potter was sorted into Gryffindor without my interest or interference. On the 31st of October there had been a troll loose in the castle, but I didn't bother changing my routine, keeping up with my usual time turner enhanced 31-hour long days. It was that night that I realized that even if I didn't want to enter in the mess that Voldemort's second war would bring, it would probably find me anyway.

Unless I left Britain immediately after my last year. And I would need money for that. Even if the book on skinning animals had useful spells for treating the leather, becoming a hermit and living alone in the woods did not appease my thunderbird side. Besides, living a life in hiding or exile until 1997 annoyed me a lot. I was sure that there would be a lot of lost money in the Room of the Lost Things, or stuff that I could take and sell at a later date. So, money was not a pressing issue. Learning expansion charms would probably help, and it was scary interesting.

I needed to learn how to enchant. And Practicing both fighting and general venting against the bludgers was fine and dandy, I was pretty sure I could already toss around three random seventh years like ragdolls, however, a muggleborn with my academic record would annoy a lot of purebloods. And Voldemort too.

I was not so stupid as to believe that my existence hadn't already changed the canon Potterverse, even if only a little. I was hoping it would mostly stay on track until I was able to leave to... I don't know, Australia?

However, It was a good thing getting ready for the worst. The worst being facing Voldemort. That was, in fact, literally the second point of the Great Plan to Live Long and Happy.

I had got a bit lost with magic of every kind. So, it was time to up my game a bit. So, From this year forward, I would keep a single subject of research per day, in order to unwind and try to avoid my tendency to jump from one topic to the other another. I would keep a weekly night in the RoR to learn how to control Fiendfyre. I would keep up alchemy practice two nights a week because being able to redirect energy was something with limitless applications. I would ask for a Room in which I could safely learn how to magically enhance my body, being faster and stronger would make me deadlier in close quarters. One night a week to learn how to properly enchant. The sixth night in the RoR I asked for a Room that would teach me how to survive an open war. On Sundays I would study healing charms, wards and practice spells ad nauseam.

During the Cristmas holidays, Flitwick walked me to the Mirror of the Erised,

I whistled, *That is some big ass mirror* I thought distractedly when we arrived.

"Ten points from Ravenclaw, Mr. Taylor" added my Head of House.

Oh, I said that out loud. I realized belatedly.

"Indeed, Mr. Taylor."

My occlumency kept progressing, but I would need a few more years before I could reign in that absent-mindedness that was now my very well-known quirk.

The mirror showed me images of myself a few years older, now in a proper wizard tower on a high cliff, and of me while exploring the wilderness. There was also a witch on my side, and while she was blurry, I knew she was beautiful, we loved each other, and she was just as magically powerful as I was. Around us, from time to time children were popping around and growing to be extraordinary and happy on their own. And in the background I could see humanoid

shapes of other witches and wizards that challenged me and mine, in understanding and prowess, daring each other to reach new heights.

"Mr. Taylor." Flitwick covered the mirror with a sheet.

"You got lost in there for a while" he spoke gently, like he was almost sad of taking me away from my reverie.

I simply smiled to him, now I knew that the thing I wanted above all was proof that this second life of mine was real, and that someday I would no longer be alone in it. My Great Plan to Live Long and Happy was spot on, after all. I slowly unsheathed my wand, focusing on what I did just see, making it real in my head. I added to it the feeling of the thunderbird protecting me while letting loose, the feeling of not having to hide the quirks of the demiguise, along with the steady and sure strength of the Old Tjikko's roots.

With my eyes closed, I raised my wand and uttered "Expecto Patronum." After three seconds, I felt it, filling the air around me, a combination of warm-safety-love-strength-joy that filled my lungs and made me laugh: I was sure it was a perfect Patronus.

"Oh my..." I heard Flitwick say.

I opened my eyes to see a silvery, winged form roaming just under the high ceiling of the room.

"That's one big bird." I said, and my surprise disrupted my focus enough to cause the Patronus to dissipate.

"That, Mr. Taylor, was an Albatros. A very evocative Patronus indeed! A *Diomedea exulans* if I'm not wrong. I'm glad to have taken the risk with you, if only to see it. A corporeal Patronus at fourteen! I'd say 30 well-earned points to Ravenclaw! Just wait until I tell Minerva! Oho! Why, the last time..." I tuned out the diminutive professor, thinking about the form of my Patronus. It was an occasion for deep introspection if I had ever seen one. What did I

know about the Albatros? A symbol of good omen? No, that was only a song by the Iron Maiden. *They fly on the sea all the time, without flapping their wings because they're so fucking huge... Oh well, if nothing else, I guess I now have a new topic of research.*

I once again turned my focus to the Charms Master, who was about to finish his tirade against Minerva, who apparently had kept using the three eldest Weasleys as examples of perfect students. The eldest had been a good student indeed, but there was a clear difference between academic prowess and the results one could obtain with dedication and...

Ok, maybe he wasn't about to finish.

I studied my wand, for a while, trying to understand what the fleeting sensations reverberating along our bond meant.

I don't know why the mirror would be something that required the professor's presence to be studied, I wanted to tinker with it without other peoples around. "It's a marvelous coincidence that you happened to be studying enchanted mirrors during this summer, I've waited for more than a couple of decades for the opportunity to study this object in particular. I couldn't rob you of the opportunity to experience it, before approaching it with a cold mind in the next days. We only have time until the end of the winter holidays, after all. I would brush up your diagnostic charms, Mr. Taylor, this opportunity isn't something that happens even once every century."

I didn't even realize it, but my Head of House had walked me all the way to the common room.

Well, maybe I was still a bit out of it. I participated with Flitwick, Vector and Babbling to the research on the Mirror, along with a couple of other students, more specifically a Slytherin and a Hufflepuff. We roamed around it, it was uncovered, but everyone was careful to not look in the reflection it offered. Nobody missed the fact that they were seventh years, or that out of the students in the House of The Most Brilliant (that was Ravenclaw, by the way),

Flitwick chose me for this opportunity. I felt smug. My wand felt the same. Basically, we students randomly shadowed the three professors that were storming around the artifact. While Babbling drew runes with her bare hands! in the air, I managed to recognize at least three arrays that were meant to glow in a pattern that probably meant something only for her. Vector was writing down calculations with a base thirteen that were a bit over my head. Flitwick however was a whirlwind of detection charms linked to several self-writing floating parchments. From time to time I could notice a disapproving frown on the faces of the two female professors, followed by a glance towards their protégés. And that meant Flitwick had taken me under his wing! And it also meant that we students were doing something wrong. While the other two tried something from time to time, I still had to do anything. I didn't think I could outshine even one of the professors in their respective fields.

"The point is understanding how it does what it does right?" I asked.

The sardonic smiles answered my question. I raised my wand, trying to listen through her, instead of focusing on our bond like usual. Closing my eyes, I waited. There was... something. Sparks, fluttering like feathers. I recognized Flitwick, his light burned more bright than the others. I could distinguish the two students from the two female professors, like different shades of the same color. The mirror did not register on my senses, at all.

"Well, we know it's not legilimency." I said out loud, I had my occlumency active when I saw the mirror with my Head of House for the first time. "And it shows you something very personal, very deep." I kept going, noticing that Flitwick stopped doing whatever he was busy with and looked at me, waiting to see if I had a point. "So, either it's sentient and what it shows is a defense or hunt instinct of some kind. Either because it fears that those who gaze into it would wish to destroy it, or because it gains something while its prey is gazing into it." I made a pause there, my favorite professor looked intrigued at the approach I was offering, before concluding: "The more sinister alternative is that somehow it reacts to the soul."

Now Flitwick started casting at double speed after giving me a somewhat startled look. "Could you cast *homenum revelio* sir?" I asked.

"Way ahead of you, my boy!" the half-goblin answered merrily. After a deep breath, I used one of the occlumency exercises to sharpen my focus: I visualized a gust of air picking up dust particles and forming a little twister in which the dust became shiny, before visualizing it pooling into an amorph mass of mercury. I poured my intent through my wand, and with a twirl, I flattened the mercury turning it into a floating mirror.

"While I've never seen silent conjuring done from a fourth year, Mr. Taylor, is there a point in your show of prowess?" professor Babbling asked.

"I wanted to check if looking into the mirror in a reflection would activate its enchantments." I explained quickly. "Could you take me out of the room if I awaken it?" I continued distractedly. I positioned myself behind the mirror of the Erised, on the left. I moved my conjured construct in a way that would allow me to see the enchanted object. I saw only myself, its magic stayed silent. I was running out of ideas.

"Moppy?" I called.

She appeared with a pop: "Master David calls?"

"Yes, Moppy, can I steal a moment or two of your time? You don't have to if you have something else to do or if you don't want..."

After a second that the house-elf spent thinking about it, she answered: "Master David can ask and Moppet can answer! *House Elf enthusiasm is something else*. I thought with a smile.

"I would like it if you could tell me what does this mirror feels like." The others looked at me, appalled and baffled at my idea.

"Moppet feels it... Like a door without a handle. And.." In the end, every one of my ideas proved inconclusive.

Days later, my ravens were able to express themselves through a very peculiar selection of words that cost a lot of points to Ravenclaw (I don't know why they loved words like 'fuck' 'cunt' and 'bullshit' so much). Even they couldn't feel anything from the mirror. We determined that it didn't alter your memories, that if you breathed right over the mirror, your breath did not mist up.

We knew lots of things it did not do. And while ultimately interesting, was also useless. In January I ended up once more in Flitwick office because of my ravens. While they were slowly learning to relay messages between me and Kettleburn, they also enjoyed swearing, a lot. So, while the students found them hilarious, I quickly became adept with silencing charms.

Instead of reprimanding me, we discussed my participation in the study of the mirror of the Erised. He was proud. Not because I found any kind of solution to our conundrums, but because I used my head and adapted the tools at my disposal to try to overcome our snags. And I was happy to make him proud.

For a few weeks, I noticed that something was off with Hagrid, but I didn't realize what it was until one morning, during our 5:15 am pre-work tea I noticed the boiling pot on the fire. The fucking dragon. Obviously, I didn't want anything to do with that specific disaster-to-be. But Hagrid had gifted me a giant knife the year before and taught me a lot of things. And most of all, he was a friend.

I've always been a staunch supporter of free will and individual responsibility, so I only said: "Hagrid if you need some kind of extra help, just let me know, ok?".

It shouldn't really have surprised me to receive a request from Hagrid two days later to help hunt down whatever was killing unicorns in the forest. I grabbed several vials before going toward the Forbidden Forest, because if a unicorn was going to die, who

was I to squander the spoils? Hagrid handed me my trusted knife (even if it was more like a gladius than anything else). And we waited for the firsties who got themselves landed in detention while petting Kurotsuchi. Yes, I brought my owl, because only an idiot would ignore the help of a night-time predator who could both see and hear better than you.

The kids looked how they were depicted in the movies, and they brought with them a feeling of nervousness that spooked Fang a bit. Malfoy was appalled that anyone in their right mind would ever enter the Forbidden Forest without being forced to. Since I had a little experience with the outskirts of the forest, I ended up in charge of Potter and Draco, along with Fang as well.

As soon as something happened, the dog would run to Hagrid and guide his group to us. The Keeper of Keys didn't need any help in navigating the Forest and would have found us with little effort if needed. Since I couldn't resist, I obviously chose to spook the two eleven year old's.

"So, I'll explain the Rules To Stay Alive that any eleven-year-old brat has to follow." I started talking. "Stay close, keep quiet if you can, shout when something tries to eat you." and before Malfoy started complaining about whatever, I silenced him with a twitch of my wand, who was finding the entire situation interesting. "And spare me your whining, hearing is more important than sight here, and if you talk when it's not needed you effectively cripple our ability to be aware of an attack. However, if I have to silence you, you won't be able to call for help. Do we understand each other?"

After he nodded furiously, I lifted my spell before conjuring some mercury and explaining to them to keep an eye out for it. After doing that, I added 'Why unicorn's blood and Mercury look so much like molten silver' to a spare parchment I had with me, before turning my back on the eleven years old wizards before I summoned a few floating lights over our heads, so we could see where we were putting our feet, before leading and proceeded to lead them deeper into the the way, I collected three unicorn hair strands that had

gotten entangled into a few bushes and I filled a vial and half with unicorn's blood. We stumbled upon Quirrel-mort and several things happened at the same time.

Fang bolted, along with Malfoy.

Harry Potter fell on his knees clutching his forehead.

I snapped my wand forward like it was the handle of a whip.

From the tip of the ancient wood a bolt of lightning shot toward its target. White plasma arching in the night, followed by a thunderclap.

Quirrel-mort was flung back further into the woods.

While I was wondering why an electrical current would ever fling someone away instead of grounding them, I strode towards the dying unicorn. "Are you okay brat?" I asked Harry distractedly, I knew he could handle whatever shit happened to him, but he was eleven for the love of Merlin. I sat on my haunches near the wounded neck of the wheezing beast, and focusing on the images of blood vessels closing, blood clotting, muscle re-growing and skin being knitted together as good as knew, I pushed my will through my wand. I was deep into it, after a while, however, I noticed that something was resisting the change I was willing into existence. It wasn't anything rabid or hateful, like I suspected Quirrel-mort's magic would feel like. It was more similar to... distrust? Ok, I called bullshit. The unicorn's magic was working against mine because the creature didn't trust me?

Oh, I guess it can tell that in my mind I am an adult.

"Brat, come here please."

After few seconds Harry Fucking Potter was there, with a determined glint in his eyes.

"I need you to convince the unicorn I'm trying to help; she doesn't trust me and she is refusing my healing spells." The kid looked at me like I was completely crazy, but wisely swallowed whatever 'i don't know how' thought he had before simply asking: "How?".

I have no idea.

"Put your hands on her neck, look at her in the eye and talk to her. Explain that I'm trying to help. Focus on warmth, happiness and calmness." I explained.

I was bullshitting my way through the problem, but my idea made sense in a certain way: physical contact let souls leave an impression on each other, and Harry Potter was as innocent as they came. After maybe a couple of minutes, I noticed the mistrust give way to wary acceptance. Slowly, I healed the unicorn mare, who as soon as possible jumped up, walking around the clearing, watching me the entire time. She turned her behind toward us and flicked her tail: A single strand fell to the ground, like a silvery spider web floating in the winds.

I picked it up putting it in an empty pocket: that was an invitation to wandcrafting if I ever saw one.

"Well done Harry Potter." I commented quietly, he now deserved to be called by his own name.

5. year 5-6

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

1992-01 September

Aside from the scuffle in the Forbidden Forest, the last year had continued on Rowling's tracks. Harry saved the stone, Dumbledore made Gryffindor win, yadda-yadda-yadda. Not that I cared about house points. *But I still call bullshit.* My fifth year had been truly enjoyable, even with a thousand-year-old basilisk roaming around, it didn't take a genius to go around only with other purebloods. And the rare times I was forced to move alone due to the necessary security of the time turner, the professors enlisted for me the help of a random house-elf, which coupled with my partial transfiguration in order to give myself a superior hearing, managed to keep me away from creepy noises.

On the other hand, Luna Lovegood was a heart-breaking, walking clusterfuck. She believed in some unlikely shit, but our Transfiguration professor was actually a tabby cat, so I didn't think anyone had the right to force their beliefs upon her. When her disappearing belongings forced her to go to a lesson without her shoes, I threw the snickering idiots responsible into an illusion that landed them all in the hospital wing for a week. They now jumped at sudden movements, moving shadows and were terrified by invisible Hoknipings. I only named the things; I had no idea what the idiots had actually witnessed. Cho Chang could no longer play seeker. *Pity.*

For Christmas Luna received a bunch of notes on a simple warding mechanism, along with a bracelet made of three interwoven unicorn hairs that held a glowing ember in a tightly knotted net. The hairs were the ones I picked up during the Quirrelmort Hunt in the Forbidden Forest, while the ember came from the biggest of the fires

in the Hogwarts' kitchen. It was always burning and was warm to her touch but would burn anyone else.

My study of cursed fires had progressed steadily, in a couple of years I would be able to safely cast Fiendfyre, and I could now alchemically redirect kinetic energy. I finally learned how to use runes and charms to turn a trunk into a vast dumpster: the arithmancy that stabilized the construct was still a work in progress, and turning a wooden trunk or a backpack into an apartment were two very different things. The 'magically enhancing my body' project didn't work out, and I tried everything I could think of.

I would need to do it the old fashioned way, maybe learning how to fight with a short-sword in my right and a wand in my left, since regardless of what Ollivander had said, my wand wanted to be held only by my left hand. I determined that the binding process that brought together wood and core was based on alchemy. In fact, even if my wand appeared to have multiple personalities, she had only one soul-voice, that could be described as: mind your own business - keep growing - avoid conflict but when unavoidable stand your ground.

I still needed to find a wand tree for the unicorn tail hair I've been given as a 'thank you' after the healing in the Forbidden Forest. Speaking of which, the centaurs did not like what happened in the Forbidden Forest on the night I met Quirrelmort, oh no, they had foreseen the death of the mare and did not appreciate my stealing their thunder when I said 'Mars is bright tonight' before them.

The RoR-training steadily improved my reaction time, as well as my stamina.

The very interesting stuff, however, had been warding: basically warding and enchanting were brothers. Runes tied in place your intent, and if you did your arithmancy right, the wards would become self-sustaining. Runes marked the changes you wanted to bring into reality, but enchantments wore down for the same principle that ruled transfiguration: if you charmed a ring to emit light, after a while it

would 'remember' that originally it wasn't supposed to, and start to actively oppose the will that crafted the enchantment. That could happen after a decade or two, if the enchanter was capable enough.

Wards worked in a similar way, only, in that situation, runes were used to mark whatever you were warding as yours. And As such you could ward only stuff that recognized you as its owner, or with the permission of the said owner (in the latter case the wards would last far shorter. So there had to be a mutual connection between your opinion of what you were warding, and the 'feelings' towards you of the object itself. Even if it wasn't really noticeable, my shoe would respond to my magic more readily than it would to Flitwick's one. Goblin forged stuff always kept its magic because the enchantments were layered into the object while it was being built. It had been a fascinating topic of research, and Flitwick found several of my ideas spot on, even if exposed in an unconventional form. He looked at me funny when I started talking about the will of the objects. I found out that yes, there were ways to magically learn a language. It required potion and a book from the language you wanted to learn with the translated book in the language you already knew. It was devilishly complex.

At the bare bones, holding for three hours the potion in your mouth would enchant your tongue so it would 'transfigure' the sound exiting from your mouth. The enchantment on your tongue would last for a couple of years, during which a wizard would naturally come to associate the things he said first with the sounds he then heard, and would then strive to learn how to replicate those sounds with his own mouth. It would be interesting to see what would happen if I were to use two unknown languages. Probably nothing, since the enchantment was based on your knowledge of one of the two languages. I had to see what would happen if I tinkered with the potion and my next batch of raven eggs.

So, I could now speak Japanese if I willed myself to do so, and the more I spoke Japanese, the more I came to instinctively know the language. I could not read it though, which made sense, since our

neural pathways and thought processes are built upon the language, we think in: a magic that forced your mind to think in a new language would probably cause an aneurism, or make you go completely bonkers until the effect faded. Or perhaps it would turn you into a wizard only capable to communicate with grunts, more like a very smart animal than anything else.

Probably said process would be classified as a curse. Another thing to research.

Oh, and being an Animagus was awesome, by the way.

1993-01 September

The OWL results came in during July:

Transfiguration: O

Practical: **O**

Theory: EE

Charms: O

Practical: **O**

Theory: EE

DADA: EE

Practical: O

Theory: A

(Not knowing the necessary wand movements penalized me in the theory part, but silent casting without the necessary wand movements had been mind-blowing)

Astronomy: O

History: O

Herbology: O

Practical: O

Theory: O

Potions: O

Practical: EE

Theory: O

Runes: **O**

Arithmancy: **O**

CoMC: O

Practical: O

Theory: **O**

Divination: EE

(I foretold that the innocent would be free after the true responsible had been seen, at this point I didn't know if it was because I read the books, or I actually divined the future. It worked both for Hagrid and the basilisk, and for Black and Pettigrew.)

Muggle Studies: **O** (I sat it without attending a single lesson, or reading a single element of the syllabus)

So, once again, I was a kickass wizard. The O bolded meant that I knew enough shit to sit my NEWT in that class.

My trunk was now warded and contained a whole apartment. After walking down a spiral staircase there was my kingdom: a personal library, a brazier that warmed the whole room, a kitchen, a bedroom, [a den/living room with] a couch, and comfy armchairs. Properly setting up the toilet had been a nightmare, but I had a shower-tub that was totally kickass. The floor was covered by real grass, half of the walls were blackboards, the others displayed open fields. There were bottles hanging from the ceiling: they contained light in various forms, either fireflies, bluebell flames, glowing mist...

I was very proud of it. But there was still room for vast improvements.

If I wanted to modify anything, or add a room, I had to break it down and begin anew. I wanted to make it something I could build upon in a modular sort of way. But even building in feather charms had been a nightmare.

Space manipulation itself had been a tough nut to crack; I had to become proficient enough to manipulate gravity itself. And that almost killed me twice. The gist of it had been that since gravity bends space, you could adapt and stabilize the curved reality. Meaning that my apartment was the inside wall of a gravitational well. Strangely, the time flow was not affected.

So, while inside the trunk, I experienced space like it was linear when I actually was inside of a non-Euclidean space.

The next step would be to become able to turn an empty section of the inside wall of the gravitational well into a new room without destabilizing anything else while adapting the featherlight charm to it. Managing to have multiple compartments would be a challenge. More like layered surfaces over the inside wall of the gravitational well. There were limits, I would never be able to safely build a manor into a fucking hat, however, the more space at your disposal, the more you could enlarge it. It was easier with tents, enchanting those you could stretch the space among the folds. Say what you want

about wizards, they didn't have a Stephen Hawking, but that did not stop them from studying the space-time continuum.

And that was another reason muggles would never find curse breaker sites, and why the Amazon jungle, as well as Norway's and Canada's forests were still unexplored.

The last step would be turning the trunk into a necklace.

And Plastic tents could not be safely enchanted, for the same reason one could not enchant glass, or resin. They all were, at their base, very viscous liquids. At some point I would probably be able to produce a crystal that I could use like glass, but that I would also be able to enchant. Liquids do not recognize an owner, and any enchantment would pass through them, or slide off them.

You could enchant stuff that would manipulate water, or force it to assume a peculiar form, or alchemically change its state of aggregation, even if the same could be done with charms. But you could not directly add magical properties to it.

That, I thought, explains why we study potions.

Flitwick strongly suggested me to drop some subjects. But with having as a career plan "Learn Everything," did not leave him any ground to forbid me from attending any of the NEWT lessons. And I wanted to keep abusing my time turner. Seriously, I was used to 31-hour long days, and during the summer I grew restless and I started hating the Circadian-Cycle. *Addition to the plan: weekly, two RoR nights would be dedicated to learning how to craft a time turner.*

I didn't know how old I actually was. But I should have turned 17 in December.

1993-01 September

To my great dismay, I had been unable to craft a time turner. My second project had been a success however, or at the very least I thought so.

What I managed to achieve had been hatching an actually intelligent, talking raven. However, I learned later that I had vastly overreached my abilities at this point, and she was much too annoying. The original project was hatching a raven capable of speaking every language I had chosen.

For this project, I used one of the 3 Pensieves the RoR was able to provide (even if none of them were nearly as impressive as the only one actually shown in the HP movies). I made some adjustments to the enchantments of this Pensieve to try to enable it to function the way I needed for this experiment. I also utilized within it an altered version of the potion I used to learn Japanese. The alterations to the potion were to try to allow the raven to learn to speak English, Spanish, Italian, French, Japanese, Russian and Deutsch.

Finally, I didn't want this raven to live only the standard ten years of its species, so, like a mad scientist, I poured the last vial of unicorn's blood that I had left into the Pensieve, hoping for it to infuse, if not immortality, at least longevity. Following a spark of inspiration, or maybe just madness, before the start of the process, I added twenty-one drops of my own blood to the mix of the potions in the Pensieve. Only then I delicately poked a hole into the raven egg, careful to avoid puncturing the yoke, and then placed it within the Pensieve.

She hatched on the 21st of March. A raven with white feathers and the left eye like molten silver.

I had been a responsible scientist only for the first half of the experiment. After that, I had then thought about what Ollivander said, "feelings are everything". Sure, he had been speaking about Wandlore, but I hadn't been able to resist, and caved into the urges of the mad wizard inside of me, who simply felt that adding my blood and memories was the 'right' step to add to the procedure. That

following my gut didn't completely compromise my project spoke somehow for itself.

After the said project, and its partial success, I gained a relatively good knowledge of ritual and blood magic. In addition, through my research, I started to gain at least a hazy understanding of the soul.

Rituals are a non-adaptable form of temporary magic enhancement. Rituals are comprised of peculiar ingredients and exact runes that linked them to you in a specific pattern. Through those, you attempted to channel into yourself a sliver of the world-soul, directing it into yourself with a singular purpose.

Increasing the chances of a safe pregnancy? Ritual.

Preparing yourself for battle? You could either strengthen your body so it could withstand a giant punch, or gain an artificial affinity for fire, or become able to hold your breath for a month (if you wanted to battle underwater that is). But you could perform a ritual for only one of these purposes.

Ritual magic was very much older than wands, so it was the only way to become fearsome enough to protect this or that one's village or town against those random muggles, or that dragon, or whatever.

At some point, the sliver of world-soul would flow out of you to once again become apart of the Whole, leaving you without the boosts of said ritual. And rituals were not cumulative, if you did one ritual this week, you couldn't perform another until the effects of the first didn't bleed out completely. Under a theoretic point of view, you could try a ritual that would enhance different properties of both you and your magic. Different properties that would without a doubt end up conflicting in some absurd way that nobody could have foretold. And the effects of a silver of the world-soul in your magic (which would be your soul-space) or within your body, being in conflict with another sliver inside you? Well, it would tear you asunder.

Quite Literally and metaphysically. So, runes arranged in a proper way would redirect the properties of the other ingredients to enhance one of your own. It was impossible to quantify exactly what the fuck the ritual would do, because, to use a metaphor, you were a fish trying to coerce sea currents to aid you through squiggles and herbs or animal parts on the fucking sand. Therefore, while very old and documented rituals were stuff that you could do, experimenting with ritual magic was a one-way ticket to a very strange and unusual death.

Making up runes was also a very stupid thing to do. We study Ancient Runes because Futhark, Norse, Egyptian, Sumerian, and other old tongues are calm, and do not have a will of their own. Nobody would try using Aztec runes, because they still remembered how it was to be alive. In my opinion, it was likely because of the Aztec's willing human sacrifices, that from time to time poured a wizard or a witch' absolute faith into a ritual suicide.

Using symbols you read about in an RPG would either kill you because of your view of said runes would conflict with the views of those who thought about them into a different way; or transmute you into a chaotic mess I wouldn't wish to see. And finally, making up symbols don't grant them power.

Now, to create a new runic language, you could ritually murder thousands of people over altars inscribed with the whole new set of runes. And keep that process up long enough and it would imprint the meaning of each of those runes into the world-soul. At this point, the runes would be 'alive', and if you were to keep performing ritual sacrifices, they would even work for you (and only you) in the way they have been conceived. They would probably recognize every single magic-user but you as an 'offering-food', they would see them as a 'sacrifice'.

The Runes being 'alive' however, means that from time to time each of those new runes you 'birthed' could grow, evolve, or change in a way you don't, wouldn't, couldn't realize, or understand. And you can't foretell the happenings or the direction of said evolution,

because the ritual sacrifices have brought the runes into being with a biological variable as their base.

Thus, we used Ancient Runes because, while the world-soul remembers what they are and what they mean, the Runes themselves forgot and are virtually 'dead'.

It's the world-soul memory that allows them to work, and since you are a part of the world-soul, their interaction with you and your magic is passive, and somewhat static. In short, they no longer have the ability to change or feed off your life. The obvious following line of inquiry would be what is the relationship between Runes and Old Gods. *That's some shit I will research once I'm old enough to die without regrets.*

Blood magic is close to ritual magic, but it's not quite the same. It's based more on pain and willing sacrifice than anything else.

Voldemort's ritual to regain a body at the end of Harry's Fourth year, had been a ritual in name only. It had been, or would have been, blood magic, nothing else, so that body wouldn't naturally fade with the waning effects of a common ritual, because the sacrifice had been paid in full.

Blood wards? You write down the runes that anchor your will to a place with your blood: it strengthens your claim on whatever you are warding, and can kill you if a stronger blood-magic user (stronger means 'with a louder soul-voice') stumbles upon them. Contracts written in blood between you and another? Blood willingly poured, means you anchor your life to the upholding of your agreement (this must be written in runes the world-soul understands, so, no English).

Blood sacrifice? You pay the price for submitting a 'contract' with the world-soul. If you cut your palm to symbolize said contract? The scar will never go away, and you will always feel a 'pull', a wish to submit another contract. Why? Because the world-soul is alive, and every soul that dies goes back to the Whole, it is consumed, meshed with the Everything, and then comes back to life again in another form.

Basically, the world-soul eats the souls of things that cease to exist in a specific form, before birthing new ones, that is. 'Nothing ends, and Everything changes' was a curiously exact motto that summed up my tentative understanding of the World.

Wizard and Witches can become ghosts, meaning they stop being a connected part of the World-soul. Then how can magic influence them? If wands are bridges between the you-soul and the world-soul, magic is both the river that keeps them apart, and the umbilical cord that keeps them linked.

Hence why a basilisk's killing gaze can petrify a ghost and exorcisms do, in fact, work.

Research on ritual and sacrificial magic led me astray several times, and it was from there that my understanding of souls was born.

The most exemplary and academically fascinating result of sacrificial magic was obviously Harry Potter. Hence why I thought that blood was only a medium for the will of the caster and writing runes with it was an effective way of polishing the caster's intent. I hadn't realized until now that the (in)famous scar was coincidentally the rune Sol in Younger Futhark. That was worth enquiring about, but like hell would I discuss it with Dumbledore still alive.

Fiendfyre had been a tough piece of magic. It was the culmination of elemental animation (obviously of the fire element) coupled with destructive intent. If the perfect Gubraithian Fire was the embodiment of the caster's soul-voice, life force, and magic, then the Cursed Flame was the never-ending hunger, the unstoppable end. Fire had also an aspect of rebirth, of safety, of home. For example, there was the Hestia's Hearth fire, that once cast, would keep burning for as long as people thought about each other as family, and could not burn a family member, I remember basing the enchanted ember I gifted Luna on that. Learning how to redirect heat was useless against the cursed flame. Like every animated piece of magic, it recognized its scorching heat as a part of itself, and fought fiercely to protect it.

I found a way to bypass the limits imposed by expansion charms. Instead of several enlarged compartments, my new trunk now sported only one. Every time I wanted to add something, I built a door from the inside wall of the gravitational well to its next layer. And I had to completely rearrange the featherlight charm so it would adapt independently to the weight of my traveling trunk.

I now had a shiny black necklace, that was also my home. If the trunk would be exposed to Fiendfyre, it would automatically be Portkeyed to a place of my choosing. Basically, it was a reusable portkey, I could change where the hook would aim.

To be sure that the enchantments would never wear off, I bought iron ores through owl service (thank you Gringotts) with some of the lost money I took from the Room of Lost Things, and refined it myself. Transmuting the ingots had been easy enough, and a single drop of blood poured into the molten metal, bound the trunk to me. I used alchemy to 'forge' the iron, layering dozens of enchantments; among them, there was a built-in portkey that would bring the trunk to me, while also making sure nobody could Apparate or Portkey inside was stupid, because of reasons.

Apparating was the equivalent of a space manipulation: you yanked your arrival point toward you while spinning on yourself for some idiotic reason. Someone adept at apparition would lift a foot into a random direction and put it down at his destination.

In short, magic compressed the space from point A to point B.

Trying to "jump" into an enlarged space would see you splattering on the outside wall of the gravitational well, unless you were already inside of it (in the books, the Weasley Twins apparated inside Grimmauld Place after all).

Portkeying into an enlarged space was another stupid as fuck thing to do. Portkeys hooked the place in which it was going to land, and then would punch a hole through space-time and basically let you fall through said hole.

Space manipulation charms and enchantments used, as I've already explained, a gravity well. At the bottom of said gravity well there is an magically crafted artificial mass that acts as a hook magnet for everything that tries to portkey into the gravitational well (which is, like I said, the enlarged space).

Everything that tries to portkey into an enlarged space ends up collapsed and part of the aforementioned mass.

The best part is that at the bottom of my gravitational well I built my own Time Dilation Room. Three hours inside were one hour of real time. The only downside was that I could only open or close the Time Room once for every hour of normal time.

Following intervals of three hours for the time inside, meant that if you didn't leave the Room during the last minute of the three hours of inside [the internal] time, you had to wait for the last minute of the sixth hour, then the last minute of the ninth and so on.

That also meant that between each opening of the door and the next, the Time Room did not actually exist in the space-time continuum and was Unplottable.

In July I took a bus and traveled to see the white cliffs of Dover.

During the night, at 300 feet over the sea, I dug a hole two meters high in length and 50 centimeters in width into the limestone. Three meters deep into the cliff, I turned left and dug out a room, twelve meters deep, and ten meters wide. The ceiling was three meters high, enchanted to look like the sky, in the same way as the Hogwarts Great Hall. The wall toward the sea I charmed to be see-through only on my side. I basically created a loft with an amazing view in less than three hours. I charmed the exit so it would look like the rest of the cliff, and I wove into the spell both animal and muggle notice-me-not charms.

I transmuted a stone door that led into the 'loft' from the three meters deep entrance. For the last two months of summer, I warded,

enchanted, transmuted, and all-around built my personal fox hole. Obviously, space manipulation had been heavily involved.

I still called it Rabbit's Hole because I had all the intention of dig a lot more, to create a vast system of caves (that I would later enchant, turning it into a proper Wonderland) accessible only through the Rabbit's Hole. I would also place in it my personal monster. Salazar had his basilisk, I would find something else, maybe modify the ritual to hatch a basilisk (once I stumbled upon one) or make up one.

I had a lot of fun, even if on the 31st of July my raven ate my fucking left eye.

Everything was going well, I fed her like usual, and earlier this month, she started taking progressively longer and longer time alone to fly around. That day she returned, and hopped on my table like usual to look at what I was writing down, and, out of nowhere, quick as lightning, her beak stole my left eye, gobbling it down like it was the best treat in the world.

The searing pain was blinding, it caused my whole head to pound, blood pouring everywhere. I stumbled around for a few, agonizing, never-ending seconds until I found my wand and managed to cast a numbing and a blood clotting charms.

I was about to vaporize the blasted bird when I finally understood what the hell she was croaking: "Sorry! Sorry!". She had done a lot of shit before, stealing a quill, pushing over a book, picking up pebbles, and letting them fall on my head, always croaking up laughs and calling me insults in English, curses and 'bad-words' that she picked up by my cursing at her annoying behavior.

She never answered when I tried to talk to her to see what she could understand.

That she was croaking 'sorry' indicated that she knew she did something wrong. Additionally, I had never taught her that word.

With the numbing charm fully in effect, my analytical side briefly took over and asked: "Dōshitedesu ka?!" {Why?!} Since she had already eaten my eye; I could at least check if she could speak the other languages too before erasing that blasted bird.

She flapped her wings while staying perched on an armchair: "Blood not enough!" she croaked back.

"So you ate my bloody eye!?" I thundered, while my mind discarded briefly the pain to consider the implications of her actions.

"Eye is enough." had been her answer. "Dumbass." she added.

I went into my trunk so I could get my medkit.

She followed croaking obscenities in more languages than I knew and throwing a riddle at me from time to time, only to insult me some more when I didn't get it right. I had to almost overdose myself with numbing and blood clotting potions. I had to cut around quite a bit to remove what was left of my eye, before properly treating it, to make sure it wouldn't grow infected. The following day I sported a bandaged left eye that made me look like Fucking Kakashi and was forced to go around with sense enhancing charms on.

On my ever-growing Project List I added magic sonar and Sharingan, because if I had to have an artificial eye I would craft it myself and make it awesome, though even with the time room it would take me years of study. I added 'eye anatomy' to the research topics.

A few days after that I started moving around in the first layer of my trunk: it was a vast grass field, with a spiral staircase in the middle: upstairs for the outside, downstairs for the wonderful library and the following floors. The field was such that the end of the enlarged space matched it's beginning, the earth was only two meters deep, but the air circling enchantment was randomized and the sky (that matched the real one) was 6 meters high.

I was proud of the following floor: ever since I learned how to enchant a quill to copy other books on its own, I started writing down 6 books each day from Hogwarts' library, and with three spells I could turn a bunch of parchments into a properly bound book. When I decided that my wound would not heal more than it already did, I went to the grass field. After a deep breath, I turned into a one-eyed fox.

It was annoying as fuck having only one eye, but the other senses complemented nicely, and the occasional croaking let me avoid slamming into the fruit trees I put around the first floor of my trunk.

On the 27th of August, Raven brought me an olive branch.

Literally.

It was as long as my forearm, and it felt...empty?

On August 29th, I finished crafting my first wand: eleven inches and one third, olive tree wood and a unicorn mare's tail hair, quirky. A wand that would make the most out of healing spells and pranks.

That day I ran as a fox alongside Raven's flying form for hours.

6. chapter 6: Triwizard I

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

TRIWIZARD I

1993-01 September. Welcoming Feast

At this point in time, I was probably physically closer to being twenty than 18, however, I felt ancient. A part of me recognized that I was very much a kick-ass wizard, another repeatedly stated that I should cut down on the experiments. And since I had no idea what the fuck happened to the raven's brain, which was clearly was ill-suited to hold a random jumble of my memories and several languages, I would likely dedicate the time otherwise allocated to random discovery to the monitoring of the white raven.

Ever since Luna entered my compartment and complimented me because I was more interesting with only one eye, Raven – who I guess at this point is now my familiar - had gained a new favourite human. Raven seemingly liked Luna's blonde hair and enjoyed the flattery from the girl regarding her sleek plumage and mismatched eyes. Raven probably appreciated it more because she thought they were alike.

Calling her a bit batty was a little insufficient. She never stayed quiet, well.. aside from the times she would have to think about a puzzle, riddle, or insult.

Raven and Luna immediately hit it off, because I didn't really have the patience or the inclination to craft puzzles a raven could solve, as riddles truly annoyed me. It only got worse since the other Ravenclaws found out, and my dinner (that I had to defend from her thieving beak) had been interrupted several times with questions about me, my missing eye (admittedly, instead of an eye I had a

splatter of scar tissue, and it could be distracting I guess), and the continuous flow of riddles between Raven and Luna.

"I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with wind. Who am I?" croaked my familiar.

After a while, that the white bird spent trying to steal my food, Luna answered: "An echo".

Raven croaked her version of a laugh, flapping her wings and uncaringly hitting my left ear several times. She felt at ease like the first time we run together with me as a fox.

"The wind is an enemy, I'm the dark's remedy.

I am born tall and won't live long at all.

Who am I?" I butted in, trying to throw off the raven's game.

A single heartbeat later, Luna answered: "Candle!" beating Raven to the punch.

While my familiar squeaked outraged, Luna smiled, her magic felt... happy.

That evening I declined to take the time turner from Flitwick, explaining that I didn't really need to attend the lessons for several of my NEWTs.

And with my Time Room, I can keep living my 30 hours long day.

During a charms lesson, later in the week, Flitwick asked me to keep my familiar quiet.

"She found a way to break my Silencio, professor, and today she wanted to stay with me. I'm only grateful she refuses to stay in the dungeons."

When she broke even the charms master silencing charm, the diminutive professor tried to turn the lesson into a challenge to see if anyone found a way to keep her silent, but neither of us did appreciate being held at wand point, and I calmly advised to use riddles.

Pointing a wand at either of us was, after all, an extremely stupid way to lose their casting arm.

The last day before the calling of the Champions Raven kicked up a fuss.

"I am always there; I flow with time.

I break all bonds, and forge those anew.

I'm the rising tide, and the crumbling cliffs.

I let you learn, and rule all in the end.

Who am I?"

She kept going with the same riddle over and over again.

Until finally Luna popped up from nowhere during dinner: "It's Change."

I froze. She couldn't mean..."Read it." my familiar ordered.

"Read what?"

"Change." quoth the raven.

Read the change? I thought.

Then it clicked. What my unsufferable familiar was asking me to throw the Potterverse plot out of the window without any hope of bringing it back on track.

I cleared some space in front of me, the clattering, and the crowdedness of the Great Hall during dinner covering my actions.

I brought out the heavily modified old tarots deck I seriously used only during my OWLs.

I shuffled the heavily modified deck.

Raven hopped on the table in front of me, silently watching me with her eye that looked like molten silver, but that I knew was caused by the unicorn blood.

I distractedly took note of the fact that she was being for the first time since forever actually quiet.

I put on the table seven cards, not bothering with checking the first two, they were about the past, and while an interesting tool for introspection, at that moment they really were not needed.

I turned the middle one face up: the forking road, a choice.

Well that's useful.

I turned the last two cards.

The lady luck, with her blindfold on.

And the broken bridge.

I shot an angry look at my feathered companion. "I could have told you that without all this fuss! But it doesn't mean I should do something about it!" I hissed.

Raven flapped her wings mocking my outraged expression. "On the fly!" she croaked.

I spluttered. "On the fly? We would be flying blind and hit a bloody wall!" I protested.

"On the fly!" quoth the raven.

I still have to understand why she can ask riddles like a human but has to communicate like a drunk oracle on steroids. "Bullshit!"

"On the fly!" quoth the raven.

"Fine! Have it your way! I still say it's stupid as fuck!" I distractedly noticed that our little show made several people laugh out loud, all the ones that knew about my usual absent mindedness thought I finally cracked and gone crazy like my only friend Looney Lovegood.

They only thought about it, they learned their lesson years ago.

The Beauxbatons delegation was baffled at the display.

I pulled out a piece of parchment and scribbled my name on it. I rose, Raven proudly perched on my left shoulder, covering my blind side. The Hall went silent, it was probably bad form waiting until the last moment but see if I care. I strolled to the Goblet of Fire and dropped my name in it.

I waited a second.

"Well that was underwhelming." I briefly considered if putting my hand into the blue flames to try and feel those, but I desisted because I didn't know what would happen to me if the goblet-soul recognized me as a threat.

"Want to play riddles with Luna?"

When Harry Potter entered the room, I was once again reminded that he was bloody fourteen. And in the previous year's I had let him fend for himself. I honestly almost felt guilty, but I was in no position to interfere, it was not actually my responsibility, but Dumbledore's. I snorted when Delacour said he was a leetle boy, earning myself a glare.

She was stunning, not the washed down version of the movies, lips fuller, cheekbones higher. *Getting laid only during summer is really not enough.* A sharp poke on my left temple awoke me from my reverie. That beak was annoyingly pointy.

Oh, that was the allure then! it was an interesting piece of magic, almost an illusion, but not quite. The annoying part was that it caught me with my guard down. While I was thinking about the possible applications of what was at its base a targeted compulsion charm, I remembered that the girl was 17 and that I was 22 when I ended up in the Potterverse.

While the mental age someone has is based on their experience and not the number of birthdays he had had, and arguably in this world I stayed still only learning about magic, I still didn't feel exactly comfortable in thinking about her in that way.

The outrage at having two Hogwarts champions brought out a snide comment about the half-blind and a scarred wizard as Britain's best. That stuff acutely reminded me that this whole Triwizard bullshit was the old Panem et circenses trick to distract people from the stagnation of the economy and the corruption of those in power.

"Who will be the commentator for the tasks?" I asked, cutting down the squabbling.

"Well Mr. Taylor, that person would be me! See..."

"I thought the whole point of the tournament, besides the 'international cooperation' was showing off our respective countries' brightest students." I swiftly interrupted.

"Mr. Bagman, while surely enthusiastic, is ill-suited for the commentator role. If I remember it correctly, he left Hogwarts after his OWLs to his brilliant quidditch career. What will he comment upon when he is not qualified to distinguish between transfiguration and transmutation? Describing what everyone can see is hardly suitable. Perhaps someone from the education department from

each of our ministries can assume that role? One for each task?" noticing the approving look on the Beauxbatons headmistress and the almost enraged Bagman I went on: "You brought the best from both Durmstrang and Beauxbatons, perhaps an inter-school quidditch tournament could make use of Mr. Bagman expertise, his role would also be a part of the show for itself. And maybe we could add an over 17 dueling tournaments? Every event would be an opportunity for scouting young talent. And would not leave the students from the other schools with nothing to do. Maybe..."

"Mr. Taylor, do you remember one of our first conversations about overthinking things?" my Head of House interrupted me.

"On the fly!" quoth the raven.

"Shut up!" I told the bird.

She flapped her wing hitting my ear, squawking. I could tell she was about to go on a tirade with a lot of cursing, so I beat her to the punch.

"It can't be seen, nor it can be felt.

It can't be heard, nor it can be smelt.

It lies beneath stars, and under hills,

and everything empty it fills.

It came first, and will follow,

Ends life, kills laughter.

What is it?".

"Unfair!" whined the raven.

"You still can't solve it." I answered happily.

While everyone not from Hogwarts was looking at me like I was a whole new level of crazy, Flitwick had a face full of pride and mirth, McGonagall was itching to facepalm, Dumbledore did his twinkling eyes thing, and Harry seemed more at ease. Crouch seemed annoyed by my intervention, but the competition among schools would swallow his weak protests whole. Besides, once I told my fellow of age wizards and witches that they could show off in either a duelling or a quidditch tournament, a lot of pureblood families would put pressure on the minister, but Fudge was a bumbling fool so I didn't foresee any problems on that route.

Crouch explained succinctly the rules and gave us the date of the first task. I asked to be given a copy of the rulebook: if I could for some reason not attend lessons I didn't actually need, I could focus my time and efforts in emptying the Room of Lost Things and copying books from Hogwarts library.

When we retired for the night, the last two to leave the room were me and Potter. He was fidgeting a bit, then I remembered all the bullshit that Weasley would give him.

I tapped him on the shoulder: "You helped me save that unicorn." I reminded him "If you want a hand with the preparation, I'm available. I'll try what I can to keep you alive during the Tasks, but open cooperation is against the rules: the paranoid bastards didn't like the possibility that two champions would work together against the third."

"Dark!" exclaimed Raven.

And now I need to steal another difficult riddle from somewhere.

The Weighting of the Wands had been hilarious.

I cockblocked Rita Skeeter from dragging Harry Potter away for a private interview, refused to answer with anything different from a

"No comment." and asked the Beauxbatons Headmistress why there weren't reporters for their national papers.

Basically, an out-loud fuck you to the Daily Prophet.

Before beginning, Ollivander gave back to me the wand I crafted, smiling widely.

"Come to my shop this summer, Mr. Taylor, this is a very valid first attempt. A bit rough on the edges I would say, and with not enough guts, but really valid nonetheless." he told me.

I pocketed the wand with a huge smile. *Wandcrafting here I come!*

"Perhaps you would like to try and identify the Champions' wands? With their permission and under my supervision of course." he then asked. I was floored. There had been more than a few arched eyebrows at the outlandish request.

"Please!" my familiar croaked.

They accepted, wary, and kept a nervous look on their faces until Ollivander gave back their wands after completing the Weighting. I already knew the wands, and as such I could associate the feel of the core to the correct magical creature.

We started with Delacour's.

I slowly let my lone eye travel on the length of wood. "Rosewood" I started " 9 and half inches. And the core feels like... a hummed song." I looked at the veela, trying to feel her magic in the same way I once felt Flitwick's. They were similar, in a way, even if the wand soul-voice was naturally more subdued.

"Something from a veela? Beautiful in and out." I concluded, watching Ollivander for confirmation. He took the wand and repeated the goblet of fire book's routine.

I had to act a lot less for Krum's wand. Have I mentioned how much fun it is to mind blow people knowing stuff you shouldn't now? "Hornbeam, ten inches and one fourth. Dragon heartstring... brisk?". I ended with a question, since I suspected the last word was supposed to be the embodiment of the wand's soul-voice. But it was difficult listening for the core and then focusing on the whole. Ollivander corrected me and summoned birds with the stiff wand.

Since I was 'reading' the wands, I would be last, and I choose to fuck around with Dumbledore's brain.

"Eleven inches of holly, nice and supple." I started. I let my lone eye travel from the wand to Potter, and once again from the wand to Dumbledore.

Raven choose to join my fun.

"Through beak and bone,

I can more than see

The elder alone,

who wishes to flee,

the brother who follows,

Sōwilō arisen, from Godric's Hollow."

Croaked my familiar.

I really should not have told her about Blagden, from the novel 'Eldest' by Paolini. I widened my lone eye, like I was reading some obscure meaning in the white bird words. I turned the wand around with my fingers.

"A brother you say?" I hummed. Honestly, the magic of the phoenix felt both thrilling and playful. And was 'louder' than the other wands. *Probably because the bird is immortal and has been a part of the*

world-soul for a long time. I mentally added 'birth of phoenix' to my research list.

"Phoenix tail feather. Protection through sacrifice. And... you can cast a Patronus?" I feigned surprise. I tried to simply let my magic (or soul-voice) 'resonate' with the core inside, and phoenix song filled the air. In a flash of fire, Fawkes appeared in the air, adding her voice to the song, and the music became more. The immortal bird landed on Potter's shoulder, nuzzling him while tweaking the song into a warm-safe-courage-strength-happiness feeling.

Rita Skeeter was having the best day of her life, discovering a 17 years old wand crafter, and assisting to a phoenix playing favourites? It was gold. I let Ollivander take the wand, he looked a bit bewildered, a bit amused, and very interested in both my display and Raven's words. My familiar was a bit jealous and was trying to give me a feather from her wing that I could use for a wand. *I never considered it.*

"I like you way more than that firebird, Raven, stop making a fuss." I tried to calm her.

She flapped her wings and flew out of a window that was closed until a moment before. I laughed and gave my wand to Ollivander.

"Oh yes... one of my uncle' ones." he sighed.

"Spruce, exactly thirteen inches. Demiguise eyestrings wrapped around a thunderbird feather. A very complex wand indeed." After a second, a blinding flash followed by a thunderclap that cracked all the glass in the room, and the smell of ozone filled the air.

When everyone regained their hearing, Ollivander commented: "Eager, are we?" chuckling, he gave me back my wand while Dumbledore waved the Death Stick and repaired all the glass of the room (his half-moon glasses too).

All the wands were in working order, and the first task was getting close. Harry Potter stopped me after we left the room to ask after the bullshit Raven sprouted before. It was then that I realized: I did not put the memories of my first life into the Pensieve in which she hatched.

She blabbed about brother wands and Godric's Hollow.

Meaning she was affectively throwing around riddles about a future she couldn't possibly know.

I created a Blagden into the Potterverse. I thought, dumbstruck. "I know as much as you, Raven never explains her riddles." I honestly answered. He was probably thinking around the lines or 'why always me' or some other teen angst's bullshit.

"Let prophecies alone, they don't make sense until a long time after the events they predict actually happen, and often not even then." I tried to dismiss his worries.

"That was a prophecy? But what does Sōwilō mean?" he went on.

"Leave prophecies to the prophet that utters them. They're riddles, nothing more." I tried to nip in the bud the foolish trust in the babblings about the future.

"Elder Futhark is third-year material, you hardly need me to look at your Ancient Runes' notes." He mumbled something.

"I'm sorry, I missed that. What did you say?" I replied.

"I said I didn't take runes." he stated, he was a bit... ashamed?

Good. Maybe he will put his back into magic now and Britain won't end up a mess. "You have a rune etched on your forehead and didn't research it?" I asked, letting my baffled expression convey my opinion about his stupidity.

He mumbled something around the lines of 'asking Hermione'. I didn't point out that doing your own research teaches you far more than being spoon-fed information. To steal words from Matrix: I showed him the threshold, crossing it was up to him. The following week I researched house elves, and bound Winky to me. The idea of 'a lot of work' did a lot to turn her into a happy elf once again.

On the following weekend I apparated from Hogsmeade to Rabbit's Hole and dug another space that we would be turning into a garden to grow vegetables and the nontoxic flowers that I could use to put a beehive into my cave.

The enchantments I painstakingly wove into the walls turned the garden in an always-spring bubble. After all, if worst came to be, I wanted to be able to live in the Rabbit's Hole without having to steal from muggles. Making sure the enchantments would filter rain to water the plants without flooding my home had been challenging, but ultimately satisfying.

Coming May, I would have naturally nurtured and homemade honey, as well as homegrown vegetables. Winky had been very happy to find a master with a home filled with so much magic. That aspect would only improve with time. I still gave her several direct orders that prevented her to leave the home. Elves fed on magic, so letting her roam in a castle with 'Master Barty' was a disaster waiting to happen.

And now my home was elf-proof. To shield your belonging against Fae people, you need a contract with a Fae.

While I already knew what the Tasks would entail, I asked Harry to not tell me about the First Task. After all, since I entered myself under my own free will, I was going to have fun.

The thunderbird feather was eager to test herself against a dragon, the wood was convinced I was strong enough to face my first storm, the demiguise was resigned to the... *hotheadedness?* of its wielder.

So, when the time of the First Task came the Champion's Tent to miss Skeeter's great dismay, contained now three reporters from the Champion's respective countries. We four competitors then posed for photos; together, alone, with our respective headmasters, and with Griselda Marchbanks; who would act as a commentator for the First Task. The butterfly effect was in full bloom: Delacour ended up with the Swedish Short-snout, Krum with the Hungarian Horntail, Harry with the Welsh Green, leaving me with the Chinese Fireball.

Before the judges could leave the tent, I asked: "How will the spectators be protected?" They assured me that the wards were very safe, and that I would be able to toss around a lot of shit without any danger of hurting the roaring crowd.

"I have the feeling it will be raining, perhaps you could make sure the spectators can't be hit by stray lightning?" I merrily suggested. I told Raven to go play riddles with Luna, and for once she actually listened to me.

Someone is satisfied. I thought with a snort. She enjoyed both the photo book and the little riddle contest she had in French with the Beauxbatons reporter.

The air was not heavy with fear and nervousness like in the Canon Potterverse, the presence of reporters from the other countries and the circus act put up by my familiar did a lot to unwind the pre-battle anxiety.

"Did you know that while participating in a Task every kind of spell is permitted? And that if you happen kill the dragon it's legally yours? I have a Gringotts's rendering team waiting outside." I told to the champions that were of age.

They looked at me baffled, and admittedly I said that because every dead dragon would cost a lot to the department responsible for thinking it was a good idea to reintroduce a very deadly contest among students.

If they lost enough money, this would be the last Triwizard Tournament.

And I had managed to get my hands on a very sturdy branch of dogwood which would probably go wonderfully with a dragon heartstring core.

Potter was still the last to go, and we had been isolated from the arena because knowing the tactics of the other champions would be an unfair advantage.

"Trust yourself, and your wand." I told him before leaving the tent "the only thing magic can't do is the one you can't imagine." I would have winked if I had two eyes, but a grin had to do. After a deep breath, I entered the arena.

The rocky ground was scratched and battered, with smoldering rocks and craters, with a booming crowd all around.

With a beautiful scarlet and smooth scaled mother dragon on the opposite side of the arena. She had a fringe of golden spikes around her snub-snouted face and extremely big, golden eyes. I opened my arms, before dipping my head of a fraction, there was no reason to be rude after all.

I had her undivided attention.

I moved my wand in an arc, collecting energy from the heat, before giving it to the transmutation I was operating.

A rock behind me turned into a floating cage made of copper: I created a Faraday cage. I quickly shrunk and pocketed it, before snapping a lightning bolt toward the dragon.

Marchbanks was probably reporting that direct magic attacks, elemental or not, against a magic resistant creature were not a well-thought-out plan.

The point, however, was not harming the dragon, but enraging it, and given the horse-sized fireball shot towards me, I had succeeded. For the following thirty minutes I dodged fireballs, swipes of the tail, and bites. By then the ground held enough heat to let me complete the plan with little effort.

It was exhilarating.

With another wide wand movement, I then alchemically changed the shape of a part of the arena. It looked like the rock floor turned liquid while staying cold and wrapped itself around the dragon eggs, I didn't want the Chinese Fireball to crush them after all. I then took all the heat from the ground and threw it into the cloudy sky. The crowd had no idea of what I was planning, even if Marchbanks had been explaining every magic I used, even if only the gist of it. Several of them were booing now, but I recognized the goblins to whom I had promised a dragon: their magic was greedy, and I could taste their impatience.

Eh, see if I care. I thought.

Soon enough, it started to rain, and there was a rising rumble coming from inside the clouds. Lightnings discharging inside the clouds themselves.

Fifteen minutes later, I started to feel the strain. True, the dragon calmed down and stopped chasing me, choosing instead to keep a malevolent eye on me, but holding the lightning in the clouds was taxing, and the build-up was mind-numbing.

When I felt ready, I enlarged the Faraday's Cage, entering it but keeping the front door open.

I raised my wand, now enveloped in white, crackling energy that was based on Kakashi's Chidori. The 'one thousand birds' was a very apt name.

I forged a mental link between my hand and the contained thunderstorm. I slashed my wand to the ground before slamming the Cage's door shut.

The sky broke. Sasuke's Kirin was a kitten to the lion I brought into reality.

Without a thunderbird feather, any wand that attempted the same would have exploded.

It was like the gods themselves choose to strike down that dragon.

The lightning didn't take any discernible form, it came and went in a flash that blinded everyone and exploded a lot of ear-drums.

Luna had donned a very fluffy pair of earmuffs I enchanted and gifted to her, those near Dumbledore had been spared the bone-rattling boom, while a few brilliant witches and wizards among the crowd understood what I was going to do with a split second of advance and used deafening charms on their own ears.

I strolled to the rock I shaped around the eggs and took my golden prize, snatching two dragon's eggs while I was at it before quickly and quietly shattering a third.

The dragon handlers had to think three eggs had been destroyed after all.

The goblins hopped into the arena, quickly securing my prey.

Our accord was simple: they would take care of the rendering and keep for themselves all the meat.

I would keep the organs, the skin, the blood, and the bones.

They would gain a lot of galleons, I a lot of stuff to play with. We were all happy with our arrangement.

I completed the task, and I was without a scratch, since I had used advanced alchemy and elemental manipulation. I took a long time, killed the dragon, and destroyed three eggs.

Dumbledore gave me a disapproving six, Maxime an honest seven, Karkaroff a cheating 4, Bagman a solid ten, Crouch an enraged six.

So, 33 points. My personal task, however, had been met.

Harry potter summoned his broom and ended up first with Delacour.

The self-writing quill I set to copy down Marchbanks report did her work. Delacour sang, weaving a sleep enchantment into her voice, and successfully retrieved the egg in under twenty minutes: 46 points. Krum battled the dragon, losing his non-casting arm, and retrieving the egg while the dragon handlers earned him 25 points for his 'most valiant attempt'. *I call bullshit*. The points did not make any kind of sense, and while I wasn't first, everyone saw me throwing around the god's wrath and kill a motherfucking dragon without even getting scratched.

A few weeks later Delacour hinted at needing a proper wizard for the Yule ball, but the attendance was not mandatory under the Triwizard charter and I legally turned 18 on the 21st of December. I politely declined and we had a lovely discussion about the magic woven into music.

I went to the orphanage and retrieved my papers, writing down a bullshit new address in the standard code the ministry of magic would recognize. It basically stated my will to freely travel around, letters to me would be retrieved once a month from a specified mailbox. During the winter holidays, I built a hen house near the garden and stole both hens, grains, flour, and a load of Italian cuisine books.

Winky was a good cook.

Now the first room I dug was a vast study with a view, that I managed to keep cozy with carpets and couches. I turned the whole wall on the opposite side from the entrance in a vast kitchen. Air recycling enchantments let me always smell the saltwater without the inherent humidity. I sent a lot of Christmas presents, but I was no longer Hagrid's friend because I killed the dragon.

I sent the dogwood and dragon heartstring wand to Ollivander, and he answered with a book on wood carving with his annotations to make the wood flow with the core. The other parts of the dragon I slew remained in an enlarged crate.

Life was good.

7. chapter 7: Triwizard II

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

TRIWIZARD II

After the winter holidays, I came back to Hogwarts with a new objective. Looting it for all it was worth.

Yes, I was greedy, no I didn't think it was anyone's business if I stole stuff nobody used anyway.

There was a sixty-foot long, one thousand years old basilisk nobody would ever need (I would leave a fang for horcrux stabbing).

Un-cursing Rowena's Diadem would be challenging, but I wanted it, and once I learned to replicate it, I could gift it to Flitwick, because I liked him. And a self-made version to Luna because she kept Raven off my back playing riddles.

However, the fight with the dragon had been fun. I feared I was going to become an adrenaline junkie and live this life like a high-level player of Skyrim, bullshitting my way through wardbreaker sites and store away priceless artefacts.

Then I came back to my senses. Magic was much more interesting, and I wouldn't forget that gold had value only because humans gave it any meaning. That would be the reason why I was currently learning about water without a care in the world.

Simply directing water was easy enough, even turning it into ice or steam presented zero problems. However, I wanted to be water, in the same way I was able to be fire and lightning. The latter was a work in progress, the first would come once I perfected my Gubraithian Fire. Absolute mastery of an element came like everything else, with a lot of practice.

I knew fire with my mind and magic and guts. I knew the soothing warmth and the unforgiving hunger, the humming quality of a bonfire and the searing pain of cauterization. All of that had been part of the long way I walked to learn how to properly cast Fiendfyre, and soon, a Perfect Gubraithian Fire.

A side effect of the feather was that my wand held a minor imprint of the thunderbird knowledge of lightning. And it was a matter of time before my soul-voice became so interwoven with the wand's soul-voice that the visceral and complete understanding of lightning would simply bleed over.

That was possible only because of whatever shit Ollivander's uncle did to let my wand retain such an intense impression of the demiguise, the spruce and the thunderbird's soul voice. Potter wouldn't gain a fire affinity anytime soon. While the phoenix voice was louder, the fourth champion just didn't listen.

Being sorted into Slytherin probably would have forced him to 'sink or swim' so to speak and making more affinity on his own wand would have strengthened the bond and maybe pushed him toward greatness. The Hat had been, admittedly, spot on.

Going back to my current conundrum, I supposed that the very real, distinct, and dangerous possibility was that while being a particular element you forgot yourself and your soul-voice would unravel, once again flowing into the Whole.

Otherwise known as dying.

The understanding of yourself must be always balanced with the understanding of the element you were being.

At least that was my understanding of what the peak of elemental manipulation was.

The balance probably meant that you became what would be defined as an avatar: a balanced mixture of your will and the very

idea of the element you were channeling in that state. I would unravel the mystery of the sentience of the elements and discover if gods were still real when I was older. For now, I was getting acquainted with the Hogwarts's lake.

Meaning that I was simply holding my wand and trying to listen to the water and Raven was perched, like usual, on my left shoulder.

"I have cities, but no houses.

I have mountains, but no trees.

I have seas, but they stay still,

I have rivers, but without waters.

What am I?" she croaked.

I also discovered that riddles are an acquired taste. And I wasn't properly focusing because I couldn't for all that is holy answer the riddle! My magic resonated with my crippling annoyance and sparks danced on my wand. I sighed, maybe I could do something else, like enchanting some shit, or think of a way that could cleanse the fucking Ravenclaw's horcrux, or I could replicate the Marauder's...

"A map!" I shouted, startling my familiar.

"It's a bloody map! Where the hell did you find a riddle so annoying!?"

Raven flapped her wing, feeling smug. It took me three days. Three days of her annoying satisfied expression. And yes, I know she doesn't actually have a face, but I could tell. A subdued laugh made me notice that I had been standing still for a while and that my sudden outburst probably was hilarious for anyone but me.

Before interacting with another human, I wished to send away Raven, at least I would be spared the white feathered headache that was my familiar. After a sigh, I gave Raven one of Bilbo's riddles.

"Thirty white horses on a red hill,

First, they champ,

Then they stamp,

And always stood still."

My familiar stilled. After a second, she spoke "Unfair!" and flew away. That was her new, and quite a welcome reaction to every riddle she couldn't solve after a single second. I turned to see who was standing behind me. Fleur Delacour actually snorted after watching our bickering.

"I wanted to thank you for your Christmas gift. It was very interesting."

"I don't recall having signed any Christmas cards." I smiled.

"Oh, but you did." she laughed.

"Of wards and enchantments: a never heard before handwritten book on topics we discussed. With a highly controversial view upon souls, blood and runes."

Her magic felt... springy. "It also had a hardcover made from a Chinese Fireball's skin and was marked with an Ansuz rune. The rune of Odin himself, who is also known as One-eye." she concluded.

"Miss Delacour, that is, at best, circumstantial proof." I grinned.

After all souls and blood were forbidden topics, it wouldn't do to give aurors a free pass to arrest me.

And good luck trying to destroy or censor any part of it.

I stole a sheep and 'harvested' the vellum, working with both knife and magic to make each page spell resistant, then using ink mixed

with the sheep's blood I copied in it the result of years of research.

The fact that vellum and ink were both from the same source strengthened the feeling of belonging to the whole I was hoping to build. But that was far from the best part. With the dragon's blood and skin, I made sure the book had an identity, something that even Fiendfyre could not devour. Runic arrays had been etched on each square inch of the vellum, before being filled with dragon's blood, again and again.

The hardcover of dragon skin 'felt' the runes as a part of what once was. Hence the identity.

Obviously, the metal bindings that I forged in Fiendfyre helped. The metal was not actually metal, but an always active alchemical process. That Fiendfyre could be used in a process to create or protect was obviously a paradox.

But in this case, the Fiendfyre was the metal. Since that peculiar brand of cursed flame ate everything, even magic, and the metal bindings' identity was tightly knotted with the actual book, the binding would consume anything to keep themselves, and the manuscript along with them, safe.

I tied both their identities (that actually were the sum of their single enchantments) to the Ansuz rune. While I'm being modest, I'll say that it had been pure, unadulterated genius.

"However, if I remember it right Ansuz stands for knowledge and enlightenment. If someone started writing a series of books marking them with such a rune, I would applaud his effort. That rune more than any other stands for an idea, and ideas never die." My smile turned predatory.

"If I were to venture a guess, I'd say that such an artifact could even withstand Fiendfyre and could be used as a shield against the killing curse." Now that I thought about it, that book was priceless. That

was probably the reason why Fleur did not hate me for having refused to attend the Yule ball with her.

She was left speechless, evidently, she didn't try to cast any detection spells at it, since the book would eat them. The only way to analyze the book's enchantments would be listening to it, but they were so many and so tightly interwoven that it would only cause headaches. "I noticed you from the carriage, I thought the duelling tournament would be interesting to observe..." she went on, half invite, half excuse.

"The champions are the brightest of their schools, and we both know the distance between us and the rest." I replied, and before she could take offence at my dismissive tone, I went on. "To answer your unspoken question, I'm learning the water. I'll give you an impromptu lesson if you'll let me. I assure you it will be more interesting."

She tilted her head, knowing that there was more in my answer than what appeared, and that I was not the type to hide a sexual approach under a promise of knowledge.

I took her hand and walked on the lake. It was a spur of the moment thing, I learned how to water walk in my fourth year, and it was a skill I didn't need to use until now that I wished to awake the dying spark that I saw into Fleur's eyes.

That same wonder for everything extraordinary that pushed Luna's soul-voice where her mind couldn't completely follow and that was only a shadow in Flitwick. "I heard what they said about my thunderstorm. Weather charms. Puah! Like wand movements and some gibberish are an important part of any kind of magic." I stopped myself before starting an actual rant.

"You probably guessed by now that wand movements and incantations are only an effective trick for the mind. And while they are a useful crutch for children, they can hardly compensate for an act of magic that sprouts from understanding and will." I calmly explained.

"You probably cast the spells you're more familiar with silently and with only an approximation of the textbook wand movement."

When she nodded, I explained to her with broad strokes, about will and understanding. The watered-down version admittedly had more than a few inconsistencies, so I could relate to her disbelieving face. Noticing her sceptical look, I went on: "You spoke about duels before, perhaps a friendly one would work as a demonstration?".

She grinned, and the game was on. She knew a spell to skate on water (even if she had to use an incantation for that one). I read several books on duelling, and I could recognize a form here and there, or the most obvious spell chains. She made little use of our surroundings, but maybe it was because we were on water and veelas have a natural affinity for fire.

I was staying still with my eyes closed, trying to actively replicate Gaara's absolute defence using water.

It was like juggling: keeping control of the water under my feet, listening to the sparks that were her spells, raising the water to intercept said spells. From time to time I had to freeze the water before it was hit because her spells would have punched through.

I was brute-forcing the water into compliance, not leading it with the smooth approach I preferred to adopt. At her snarl of frustration, I thought I had shown enough.

I briefly considered if I should try to use that side effect of anti-apparition wards to compress space in a way that would make her spell slightly turn around me, but I choose to keep that particular trick up my sleeve.

I opened my lone eye watching her for a minute more, before slashing my wand with the intent to disrupt the surface of water. Fleur fell like a puppet with its strings cut.

Half an hour later she calmed down and we were having another lovely chat about magic.

The day of the second task we were all waiting on the lake, and I was donning a two-way mirror on my forehead.

It was two-inch wide and one inch high, linked to one of four giant floating mirrors that would allow the crowd to observe the task from the champion point of view.

I sent Raven to play riddles with Flitwick, since obviously, they kidnapped Luna. I was irked, but knowing her, she would probably find sleeping among mermaids and mermen quite the fascinating experience. When they told us we could begin, the one-armed Krum performed his half-shark self-transfiguration, Potter swallowed gillyweed, and Fleur went with a bubblehead charm.

I however, had no intention to get myself wet only because I had to dive to the bottom of the lake. I skated on the water until I felt I was more or less over the bracelet I gifted Luna years before. The fire of those who were family would also call to other family members if they let themselves listen. I slashed my hand in an upward arc, encasing myself in a cocoon of water, before turning it into ice, and charming it to be crystal clear. Twirling my hand, a little whirlpool swallowed my spherical-like submarine.

While going down, I conjured my Patronus to both have light and to reduce the spooking element of a giant ball of ice rushing down to crash on your village. I didn't want to hurt the half-fish people. Once I reached the bottom, I stuck the submarine down with a sticking charm. The deeper you are, the heavier the mass of water above you is, and the harder is to manipulate it in any way.

While my albatross kept flying in circles around the hostages, I moved around loose rocks, building a pipe with a 2 meters long diameter.

I used an easy transmutation to bend the rocks in a cohesive mass and vanished the water inside it. At this point in time I had an umbilical cord that linked the outside of my submarine to Luna.

I threw an impervious at it to make sure water couldn't enter it and opened the side of my submarine. I walked toward Luna, facing the last snag, keeping a Lumos floating over my head. I had to be fast.

With a twitch of my wand I freed my young friend from her bindings. The problem now was that I built the rocky pipe so it would keep the water out.

Luna would be soaking wet, and dragging her into my construct would cause my enchantment to react to it as a permission to let water in.

I was on the bottom of a lake, that was a terrible idea.

I kept Luna on the edge of the pipe, before retreating a couple of meters inside of it.

I covered the entire thing with cushioning charms.

I turned the humidity into an ice wall inside the pipe, keeping it between me and the exit, before snapping the enchantment on the end of the umbilical cord.

Luna and water flowed in and the air bubbled out. I closed the end of the pipe, before turning the ice wall into steam and vanishing the water that was about to rush down the rocky umbilical cord. Luna awoke in the moment her head was no longer encased in water.

She didn't miss a beat.

"Hello David Taylor."

I cast a warming charm at her. "Hello Luna Lovegood." I answered, "Do you want to see an icy submarine?" I led her into the ice structure, before closing the 'door' to the pipe and collapsing it.

I broke the sticking charm and let us float upwards with my Patronus unravelling and the light of the day calling us. I distractedly recognized she was humming 'Yellow submarine' by the Beatles. I have honestly no idea about how she knew it. Once on the surface, the ice sphere turned into a boat that led us to the starting point.

Krum completed his task in thirty minutes, with an incomplete piece of transfiguration, and a bite that scratched Granger's leg.

35points.

Fleur completed her task in thirty-seven minutes, with a bubblehead charm that failed along the way and an enchantment woven on the fly on a piece of cloth that brought her through the task.

46 points.

Harry Potter completed the task in an hour and fifteen minutes, because for some reason he waited around the hostages.

He used gillyweed and two insignificant spells, along with a knife, and received an indication? from miss Warren ghost.

36 points.

I had been my usual kickass self.

I completed the task in 45 minutes, with a splendid use of transfiguration, charms, alchemy. I displayed a not conventional use of the Patronus and took a moment to ensure my hostage was warm and unharmed.

40 points.

So, Krum was last with 60 points, Fleur was first with 92, Potter in second place with 82, and I was third with 73.

Luna gave me a mermaid hair as thanks for having saved her.

I didn't even try to imagine how she obtained it.

Raven ate a blue beetle and I threw her a party.

8. chapter 8: Triwizard III

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

TRIWIZARD III

1995-24 June

In the first two weeks of June, I sat my NEWTs. I was probably the first in Hogwarts history to gain twelve of them in a single sitting. The results would be released on the 30th of June, not that I did actually care. I registered myself as a fox Animagus with the ICW and showed off my form at the transfiguration practical.

We were once again in the Champion's tent and the judges were giving us instructions for the third and last task. We would have a mirror charmed to stay suspended at two meters and half of the height behind our backs, linked to a much bigger one. This would allow the crowd to see in third person the events in the maze.

There were no rules, in theory, we could kill each other without being reprimanded. I was considering if winning the Triwizard was worthy a face to face against Pettigrew.

But it was such a hassle. *I did more than enough.* I thought with a secret grin, recalling that I had gifted two seats to Amelia Bones, suggesting her to bring along the Head of the Unspeakables. I threw into the anonymous invite something about prophecy in a very mysterious way just to sweeten the deal.

If someone tried to drag me to a competition of children while I was researching something I would never attend. Unless there was a more interesting game afoot. I had called in another rendering team from Gringotts, same old deal, I hoped to see a few more creatures. *Wand cores aren't collecting themselves after all.*

And I was still irked that I couldn't access the Chamber of Secrets.
What marvel could I craft with a basilisk heartstring core?

One problem at a time. I chastised myself.

Maybe I should warn Potter? But the tense feeling of Dumbledore's magic made me wary. And I remembered that Rowling wrote about a 'flash of triumph' in the headmaster's eyes. I spoke with my familiar, who was uncharacteristically quiet: "Any suggestions?".

She croaked, flapped her wings before hopping onto my outstretched arm:

"With my not-eye I see,

the rising star, the falling tree,

the trickster that walks unseen.

Slayer of kin and a soul to bind,

with stolen skin and twisted mind,

Master and slave are one of a kind.

Not-whole rises from the ashes,

the cut-arm goes in a blaze of fire.

The western sun dies in flashes,

stormy days come in, looking for a Sire."

Everyone in the tent turned silent and stared.

Without the knowledge of the future I held, that rhyme didn't hold any meaning, perhaps Krum would get burned? Dumbledore found the words *very* interesting, I'm sure.

Lucky me, there were a bunch of laws that protected both seers and familiars, so nobody could snatch Raven away. And I killed a dragon without preparation, so people tended to be very cautious around me.

I snorted, causing more than one raised eyebrow. "Any comprehensible advice? Or something someone can make heads or tails of?" I reiterated.

"On the fly!" quoth the raven, and I sent her to play riddles with Luna.

After a while, we were all at the opening in the hedge. First went Fleur, running lightly on the ground. Potter started with a mad dash. I went in skipping. I saw Krum watching the prosthetic arm he would need to summon and attach once he could start.

We could begin with only our wands after all, otherwise, I would have dressed in dragon skin.

I unravelled this trap, squashed that acromantula, shaped the ground into a bridge to overcome a cliff. Frankly, it was a bit boring.

Then I remembered there was a sphinx.

I turned into the fox, trying to use my superior nose to understand where it was without success, before remembering that I had a wand that could find stuff I didn't personally know.

The point-me is such a useful spell.

"Point me sphinx."

My wand spun, obviously not managing to direct me towards my objective. I sighed, guessing that if it would have worked, then the mad search for Voldemort's Horcruxes would have lasted a lot less.

So I fell into myself and swept my senses through the air, picking up and discarding information faster than my conscious mind could properly register: magic was intent. I knew that there was a sphinx

ready to be challenged, I knew that it had been placed in the maze on that exact purpose, and I knew that there was some kind of magic around its area in order to keep the hedges from cutting the magical beast completely off from the competitors.

After a while, I picked up a feeling of gravity towards my left, subtle but undeniable, it was keeping an area of the maze from changing: following that feeling, magic itself started guiding me through the hedges. Hedges that I burned down with a cursed flame that was not Fiendfyre, but very close to it.

Along the way, an imperious Krum threw a killing curse at me. Since I was very kind, ended up with broken humerus, a melted lump instead of his new shiny arm, and buried into the ground with only his nose out to breath.

I turned my head to investigate the mirror floating behind me. "Perhaps you should send someone?" I asked.

I somehow managed to hear the Durmstrang indignation from where I was.

I soon found the sphinx.

A giant body of a lion and the head of a woman. Along with several tons of magic resistant muscle and a human brain.

What a terrifying combination.

And I recognized the weight of a Legilimency probe. I whistled as an answer.

She repeated to me her instructions, but then I thought: *When such an opportunity would appear again?*

"Let's have a riddle contest instead." I challenged her.

"I have been tasked with protecting this path." she answered.

"It's a good thing that I don't really care about it then. Let's play turns, shall we? You ask your riddle, if I get it right, I ask for something it's in your power to give without feeling pain.

It could be a question about you or your magic, or a tuft from your tail.

Then I ask my riddle, if you get it right, you can throw at me the next one. If you fail, I get to ask something else, and then it's your turn again."

"And if you fail?" she asked.

"Then we battle." I smiled; I was actually eager to enter this contest.

I was even glad for all the training Raven gave me.

"Agreed" rumbled the beast, she was already tasting the fun, if of the riddle contest or the promised fight I couldn't tell. But I felt the same.

I twirled my wand, raising a low wall from the ground.

I sat and listened to the first riddle, that sadly was the same Rowling used.

"First think of the person who lives in disguise,

Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies?

Next, tell me what's always the last thing to mend,

The middle of middle and end of the end?

And finally give me the sound often heard,

During the search for a hard-to-find word.

Now string them together and answer me this,

Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?".

"A spider." I answered, after a second.

"I'd like a tuft of hair from your tail."

At some point I would obviously fail, so it was a wise move to obtain 'rightfully won' parts as soon as possible.

It would be interesting comparing the result of a wand crafted with something willingly given, won, or harvested from a dead creature.

The sphinx kept a blank face and offered me her tail, so I could take what was mine.

It was then my turn.

"I'm best when it is hot outside.

You just might find me on your next ride. If you wear me, you have no pride.

What am I?"

While she was thinking about it, I started charming the clearing to hell and back, for the unavoidable battle that I was already tasting in the air.

"A cone."

Damn the sphinx is good.

"Right in one, your turn."

"If you look at me, I'm already done,

I always make two out of one.

What am I?"

I took my time, letting my magic settling in the clearing before thinking about it.

It took me 10minutes to reach a conclusion I was sure of.

"A mirror."

I was right. "I'd like a single hair from your head." she allowed me to pluck it with a blank face.

I don't know how long we went on, I started asking about her species and how her Legilimency worked.

It turns out male sphinxes do exist, but their magic is far weaker and their minds brittle. (Simply because they couldn't solve riddles I think.)

She wasn't aware of her legilimency, it was a part of her in the same way her tail belonged to her body.

When Harry Potter stumbled into the clearing, I was moved to pity and healed him. The shooed him away, I had a riddle to answer.

"I am something humans love or hate.

I change their appearances and thoughts.

If a person is careful, I will grow for a longer time.

I fool some and take away others.

To some, I am a mystery, to others a weight.

Some try to hide me, but I will show.

No matter how they battle me I will never go down.

From beginning to end I don't leave them.

What am I?"

"Age?" I answered. The sphinx grumbled.

I won again.

I was exhilarated.

And I finished my preparations. Over my regular clothes, I now had an armour made of thin plaques of stone.

I adopted Madara's armour design, only in gray.

The stone was charmed with feathers, unbreakable and cushioning charms on both sides. Because only charming something unbreakable means it just hits you, it doesn't shield you.

My helmet resembled a raven's head, and for the fun of it, spirited a mane of black feathers.

I was so glad there were so many pebbles around, transmuting them together required a light touch, but I had all the time I needed.

I was etching the last set of runes on the transmuted stone gladius I would hold with my right hand. This particular array would add a 'blood eating' component to my alchemical construct.

I set the hedges around the clearing on fire.

Now, unbreakable meant that the armour would hold for a while, the sphinx attacks would wear them down because as a magical creature, her soul-voice travelled along her physical movements.

Her will to destroy me would clash against the stone's will I imbued it with to 'not break'.

So 'not getting hit' was a safe policy, even with my little insurance.

I charmed the helmet so it would be transparent only on my side.

I didn't forget about the mirror behind me, but I really didn't care of anyone's opinion but Flitwick's, Luna's... and maybe Fleur once she saw the recordings.

I donned my helmet and rose from my seated position, checking myself over for the last time.

Wand in my left, gladius in my right, I was probably scary.

The sphinx was waiting for my request with a blank face.

"I would like to begin that battle, if you don't mind." I spoke.

The actually scary being answered, rising on her paws.

"I don't."

And she attacked.

Now, it may be obvious, but when a three meters high, seven meters long (without the tail), giant lion with a woman's head decides to attack you, it's bloody fast.

With the dragon I had time to prepare, I played on the stupidity of the reptile and used his fire as a heat bank.

I could alchemically redirect kinetic energy, but not instantaneously.

Meaning that I could slow down a flying boulder with enough time.

If one of the paws hit me, I would be flung through the maze-like a cannonball.

Her reach was superior, so I stayed very close.

The charmed ground warned me when she lifted or dropped a paw, I rose or downed a section of the clearing under one of her paws keeping her off balance.

I silenced myself and threw around thunderclaps to make sure she couldn't hear me.

I bended [bent/warped] light [around me] and spanned [summoned/created?] incorporeal illusions. Of me, of a lion, of a tree, of a fox, of a samurai of old.

I kept turning invisible and turning visible under the shape of one of the illusions around.

Lightning stung the sphinx skin and flashes blinded her for a split of a second.

I started conjuring.

Goshawks were flying like leaves into a whirlwind to rip her eyes off [out].

Alligators appeared out of nowhere to bite her calves.

Snakes tried to either lunge to bite her or slither their way to her neck trying to strangle the mighty beast.

It was madness.

And I, I was right in the thick of it, spinning stabbing, slashing.

For a moment I had two right arms, in the next I disappeared in a murder of crows.

Stone spears rose from the ground, ice arrows fell from the sky.

Three minutes into the battle, my brain was about to melt.

I noticed that I lost the silencing charm only because I heard myself laughing.

My wand was more than a simple blur.

Twitches of my fingers on the wood directed the flow of illusions, the inclination of my wrist commanded the conjured animals. The movements of my arm manipulated the elements and converted my kinetic energy to change my momentum into something without a pattern.

The sphinx did not have anything so flashy. She stomped, clawed, and bit.

Her tail batted and swept both the ground and the air, and when we crossed eyes her legilimency felt like a shard of glass pounding into my head.

She was *everywhere*.

Oh, I managed to wound her, but only scratches or puncture wounds in non-lethal points across the body.

I took the fire from the edges.

I fed it with the violent filled happiness and wrathful commitment of my determination.

I did not want to use Fiendfyre, it would spoil the prey.

I threw a two meters wide ball of fire at her face, yanking down the ground under her front left paw. She stumbled.

I was under her neck.

I stabbed my stone sword into it up to the hilt, then slashed her throat open. While she was falling forward, with a last lightning-fast movement she hit me with her right paw. I felt my right arm being crushed, and my body flying across the clearing. *Thank god for the numbing charms.*

I couldn't faint yet.

All my charms and transfigurations unravelled when I directed my will, but before that, a crocodile let me on his back and brought me to the dead sphinx.

My helmet crumbled and the black raven feathers disappeared into thin air.

I turned toward the mirror and looked into it with my likely bloodshot eye.

I cleared my throat and summoned a bit of water to drink from thin air.

"I have purchased the services of a rendering team from Gringotts. The same story of the dragon, the sphinx is legally mine under the Triwizard charter." I sighed.

I could faint now or push through the sheer exhaustion and give myself some first aid. Focusing was a problem, my thoughts escaping me, I could sleep only a little bit since I was sure the broken ribs didn't puncture my lung and that my brachial artery was fine. *No wait.*

I wasn't sure of it. I braced myself and cast the same all-purpose healing spell on my right arm. Now I only had to stay alive until the Task ended, walking e was out of the question. So, I propped myself against the sphinx and tried to rest without falling asleep. I hoped the fire would keep acromantulas and other bullshit away.

I was lucky.

1995-27 June

The tournament ended with Potter's victory. His mirror sadly didn't follow him through the portkey.

The fact that he disappeared for two hours without reason alerted Amelia Bones that there was something wrong.

When he reappeared with wounds he didn't have before, warning everyone about Voldemort, the Head of DMLE and of the Unspeakables were there to listen.

Minister Fudge could not swipe everything under the rug.

The Sirius Black case had been reopened, due to several testimonies and irregularities in the papers that documented his process.

Fudge succeeded anyway in having Barty Crouch Jr. kissed before a proper questioning could happen.

Madam Bones had not been amused.

Fudge tried to having me arrested for being an unregistered animagus but having the papers given to him by no one other than McGonagall herself shut him up for good.

The goblins took care of my prey and tried to steal my stone sword.
Greedy bastards.

All of this happened while I was asleep in the infirmary. Pomfrey had been a wonderful source of information even if she reprimanded me for a whole bunch of reasons i found unfair. But what she didn't know was in the prophet first page. Fudge already started his disinformation campaign.

In the end, she also told me I was in working order. I only felt a bit stiff.

So, all was well.

Fleur went back home, leaving me a letter that declared Britain as a madhouse. But it also said she was going to research magic for a while before exploring the world. It made me smile.

There was also a note from Dumbledore that required a meeting at my earliest convenience in his office.

While walking out, I noticed a big black dog under Potter's bed. Raven tried to meow. I ignored both.

I went to Flitwick office and let him read Dumbledore's note.

"I assume you want me to come with you?" he asked.

I simply nodded.

"I also assume that you won't explain why you don't wish to be alone with the headmaster?"

I smiled.

"Do you think you will need your stone sword?"

"Hmh, I had forgotten about that." He put the sword on the table with a soft *clunk*.

It was wrapped in a cloth, and he suggested me that I put it into my trunk.

It was a sound suggestion. While I was at it, I tossed all my stuff into the first floor of my trunk, before shrinking it and wearing it as a necklace

"I'm very busy with correcting the end of year exams, but we appear to be in luck, since the headmaster summoned me as well.

After a while we found ourselves in Dumbledore's office. A lot of less obvious magic permeated the air, but it could simply had been the end result of one thousand years of powerful wizard and witches sitting in the same place with the same intent of educating the next generation.

Snape, McGonagall and Sprout were also there.

The old warlock arched an eyebrow at the half-goblin presence but didn't otherwise react.

Raven stole the crystal cap of a bottle of ink before flying out of the window.

I snorted, pinching the bridge of my nose.

"Sorry headmaster, she likes shiny stuff and can't always control herself."

Dumbledore lips twitched upwards.

"Oh I can relate, Fawkes loves to take my glasses anytime I put them down. Lemondrop?"

I politely declined.

"You'll be wondering why I asked you here Mr. Taylor." started the old warlock.

"I can actually venture several guesses, headmaster." I answered. I was observing one of the old warlock's trinkets that likely did more than what I could understand without dismantling them.

I recognized the deluminator, or put-outer. Now that was some interesting shit. If what Rowling wrote in the books was true, and up 'til now, it was, that little thing could guide you everywhere someone spoke your name.

Your name means that said person was speaking about *you*. There were thousands of Ronald's around after all, but Weasley had to follow only one light.

I tried to *listen to* it but I didn't hear a single thing that actually made sense.

It felt like falling, but not quite.

I light cough took me from my musings. "Sorry professors. But it *is* a beautiful piece of magic. Any unspeakable would probably give both arms for having this."

"Why thank you, Mr. Taylor. Perhaps we could focus for a while on the matter at hand?"

I remembered what we were doing before theatrically slapping my hand on my forehead. "Right. Sorry. Oh, I'm here either because you want to reprimand me for having killed a dragon and a sphinx with the intent of gaining something out of their deaths, because an unspeakable asked you to convey a message to recruit me, to ask me if I knew something about the events of the 24th, or to offer me the DADA teaching position for the next year. How close am I?"

His raised eyebrows were a sound and clear 'yes'.

Flitwick kept silence, he was likely curious as well. *Ravenclaw indeed.*

Then Dumbledore spoke: "If the unspeakable left you an offer, they didn't leave it in my hands. Otherwise, I would say you are pretty much spot on."

I so love bullshitting Dumbledore with knowledge from the future. "I'll pretend you asked me all of those questions then." I started before plopping myself down on a chair in front of his desk.

"The Triwizard Tournament is a gladiator arena. Nothing more nothing less. I chose to participate because bringing back such a monumentally idiotic thing is a tragedy waiting to happen. And I find it insulting that our governments would go with this *Panem et circenses* routine to make the people look away from the blatant corruption of the heads of almost every department and the still rampaging racism that put the only half-blood as head of Goblin Liason office, while muggle-borns are mostly treated like they are something less. Oh don't make that face professor, your own *muggle studies* course is taught by a pureblood." I shrugged at their

gobsmacked expressions and turned my head around, my lone eye roaming the very interesting knick knacks around.

"So, I thought I could nip the Triwizard madness in the bud making sure it would cost a lot of money to the ministries, while having fun and gaining something out of it. I also gave birth to an inter-school duelling tournament that allows auror forces to scout among the student population also those that won't have a NEWT in potions because professor Snape only teaches to those who gained an Outstanding in their Potion OWL." I kept my tone even for all the time. It was easy since it didn't really influence me, I didn't need and didn't want to work, much less for the ministry. Snape didn't like my poke at his education standards but kept quiet.

"That was the answer to the first point. As to if I knew *something* would happen, yes, I knew, but probably less than you, headmaster. And finally, no, thank you, I don't want to teach anything anytime soon." I finished smiling.

Dumbledore was not amused, while Flitwick was... Flitwick'ing I guess. It's the term I use when the professor thinks about three or four thousand things at the same time, he gets this vacant expression that is quite endearing.

"You knew something would happen." repeated Dumbledore.

"Please elaborate, Mr. Taylor" my Head of House prodded me.

I sighed. *Well if they insist.*

"Potter's family was attacked on the 31st of October, in his first year the 31st of October a troll was let in the castle. In June, he and his friends did *something* that gained them 160 points, and professor Quirrel, who probably was the one to let the troll in and attack the unicorns in the forest, was dead." I started.

His second year saw the opening of the fabled Chamber of Secrets, with The Boy Who Lived discovering the wonders of parseltongue,

on the night of Hallows Eve. In June, Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley - who should both have been expelled in September for flying an enchanted car over muggle London - both won a Special Award for Services to the School, and the attacks stopped. Lockhart is then quietly shipped to St. Mungos for an overpowered obliviation. I think the pattern is quite obvious." I raised an eyebrow challengingly towards my interlocutors.

Snape seemed to *like* how I was reminding the professors of all the favouritism. I went on.

"His third year: on All Hallow's Eve Sirius Black himself sneaks around dementors and stabs the wrong bed without even scratching the kid inside. In June, *something* happened that enraged Professor Snape enough to tell everyone the worst kept secret in the castle: Mr. Lupin is a werewolf. A werewolf that managed to keep quiet his condition for the whole year would probably use wolfsbane, which is one of the most complex brews the human mind can imagine, and that can easily kill with the smallest mistake. Oh and in the kitchen appeared a *free elf* of all things that believes Harry Potter is the best thing since sliced bread. And this year, after a Death Eater attack at the world cup that ended *without a single arrest*, the Triwizard got restarted and the names would be chosen on the 31st of October." *My familiar made her first fuss about something that didn't happen yet.* I also thought, but there was no need for them to hear about it.

"So I tried to bull my way through and get chosen for Hogwarts. I couldn't know there would be 4 champions. At the Weighting of the Wands, Raven spouted a riddle that was not a riddle for the second time, *exactly* when I was studying Potter's wand. About a brother, and the rune the kid has in his forehead that he knew nothing about. She also talked about the sun rising from Godric's Hollow, which is where the Potter lived. I offered him my help that day, and pushed him to study runes. He sadly never asked. So, I made sure Amelia Bones was in the crowd for the third task." I concluded, conjuring myself a glass before filling it with water transmuted from the humidity of the air.

"Very logical." said Flitwick.

Dumbledore just sat there for a minute, and then spoke: "You asked your Head of House here, even if he would have been expected in my office anyway. You meant to show to both of us that you don't feel safe being alone with you headmaster. Am I to assume that it is so because you think I had a hand in the events you so elegantly strung together?"

Damn he has a fast brain.

"That's the gist of it, yes." I answered.

"Is there more?" asked then the old warlock.

"I'm naturally very suspicious of everyone in a position of power." I happily added. *There is really no need to accuse him of being a dark lord.*

McGonagall's lips twitched. "I'm sorry Mr. Taylor but I feel like there is something... more" the old warlock insisted.

Oh he is good. Maybe telling him something emotionally heavy will keep him off my back.

"I've nothing against being manipulative, god knows it solves more problems than it causes, and choosing who to groom as the next Dumbledore is your prerogative. But quite simply, I just don't like you, professor." He seemed saddened, actually saddened! He was a scary good wizard, and maybe the holes in the canon Potterverse's plot where more Rowling's fault than his, but I threw it out of the window entering myself in the goblet of fire, so...

"May I ask why?" asked Flitwick. Flitwick should have been on my side!

But I had just told him I disliked his boss, who was seen as the peak of sunshine and rainbows. The other professors looked a bit

incensed, while Snape looked... like Alan Rickman.

I kept my cool and slowly answered.

"Well, it's a lot of little things, really. He waited [until] Potter's first year to keep [bring] a philosopher's stone into the castle. He said, and I quote: the third floor's corridor is forbidden to all those that do not wish to die a gruesome death. That is most definitely an invite for eleven years old kids to explore. Then he praised his rulebreaking, both with letting him play quidditch on a personal broom, and the points for his end of year actions. I think the same happened regarding the obliviation of Lockhart and his Special Award. He quite clearly comes from a muggle home, nobody saw fit to tell him that he has a *rune carved on his forehead* instead of a scar. And he didn't prod him into learning occlumency, stuff that really could have helped him keep his emotions under control this year, as well as coming to terms with the home abuse." The professors were all adults, the best of their respective fields, and usually kept themselves under tight control.

The window's glass *shattered*.

That was McGonagall.

Sprout reigned in her magic before it could cause any harm.

Flitwick, like the wise Ravenclaw he was, kept his cool.

Snape's magic felt *predatory*, for lack of other terms.

However in all of this, I was entirely focused on Dumbledore, his reaction would tell me if I were in danger or not.

He was far too experienced to lose the tight control he kept on himself, and occlumency naturally helped develop an awareness of one's own face, so I was looking for the tiniest bit of emotion.

His magic usually felt like... calm itself: the stillness of a pool nobody was using, the solid certainty of a cube-shaped stone. But... *There!* A flicker, for a split of second, there had been a wave, and the stone glinted like steel. Rage. It had been smothered before it could take its first breath. That, along with the instant of shock showed by a sudden stillness on his facial features, confirmed it and I took a deep breath, relieved.

He didn't know.

All of that happened in less than half a second, then Snape, of all people, talked: "If this is a joke of some kind..."

"No joke professors, Harry Potter is spooked by sudden movements unless he is flying or close to someone he trusts, is jumpy when crowded, and almost underfed." Before they could interrupt me pointing out that those were not proof enough I went on with the true nail into the coffin.

"And he grew up in a cupboard." Before any of the professors could react in any way, Dumbledore spoke.

"How do you now this?"

It was a legitimate question, while the behaviour was something that could be observed, this was a detail one could come to know in one of two ways. If Potter himself told you, or through legimency. Obviously, in this case, it was the latter.

Now how to phrase it in a way that doesn't make me look like i stroll around using passive legimency on everyone, even if its true?

"After the Weighting of the Wands I offered him my help, I was sure he would have accepted it. So I skimmed the surface of his thoughts, since I wanted to get an idea of what I was working with. There was his first Hogwarts letter, addressed to the cupboard under the stairs. Then a lot of letters being burned. Then we spoke about the rune on his forehead and he thought about his parents. I stopped

immediately. That is all." In the end, Sprout found my willingness to help another endearing, if a bit cold in its application.

Snape didn't comment, probably thinking about the 'son of Lily's' misfortune.

Flitwick gave me a stern glare, but then sighed, nodding at me, if it was because he accepted my explanation or because he considered that I was hardly causing harm, I couldn't tell. Besides, he did the same on the students that were trying to learn occlumency.

McGonagall would have probably chewed me out, but she was still thinking about the cupboard.

Dumbledore was looking at me, however and he didn't look like he was going to let it go.

"I propose we meet again on the 31st, after we all had a little time to cool down, so Mr. Taylor can also retrieve his NEWTs results."

It was clearly an order.

"I left a standard mailbox address in the care of the ministry, there won't be any reason for me to come here to retrieve my results. And before you attempt keeping them as a hostage, I'll let you know that I don't really need them." Like hell was I letting him dictate *any* aspect of my life.

One of the points of my Master Plan was being able to stand up to Dumbledore, Voldemort and the Ministry. Standing up to Dumbledore didn't mean being able to beat him in a duel, but being able to *ignore* his wishes.

They couldn't accuse me of anything, since the Wizengamot did not accept memories as proof, and veritaserum either. Well, veritaserum couldn't be used on members of noble houses, but it was a law born to protect family magics, so I could argue that I had a lot of original spells under my belt (as shown into the Tasks). But mostly,

Dumbledore said Voldemort was back, the minister said it wasn't true. So anything that could go against the Headmaster would be welcome by Fudge, and have his backing.

From the tired look Dumbledore shot me, we both knew it.

9. chapter 9: First step through war

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

1995-31 June

I slowly put down the empty mug of beer. *I never understood the reason behind why someone would willingly drink butterbeer.* That shit was a watered-down, spineless version of a coke.

Maybe for the same reason people drink pumpkin juice instead of water.

I blinked, finding the answer: "Peer pressure."

I felt better, finding answers always made me feel better, like I was going somewhere important.

"You could reconsider." Flitwick told me once again. That my Head of House managed to find me in a muggle pub in Cardiff irked me, a lot.

I'll add no-tracking charms to my list. I thought with determination.

The fact that said professor was drinking just as much as me and keeping himself from getting drunk without any magic I could detect irked me even more.

"That's it!" I decided "you're going to pay my beers too."

The half-goblin laughed.

Laughed!

Like there was something funny about our situation.

"Just explain it to me one last time." he asked.

I sighed. I considered briefly how to properly tell him to fuck off, but he always had time to talk with me about magic, and we gave each other presents every Christmas. He was a good fellow.

"I only expect a fair trade. Dumbledore wants something that he believes I can do teaching. And it's not about believing in myself, we both know I know enough to teach DADA to some bratlings. It's just that I do not wish to teach, and DADA is boring. And the position is cursed. If I wished to endanger myself, I would become an Auror. Did you know Amelia Bones herself wrote to me? Puhah! I even had to be polite in my refusal."

"Focus, David, focus." reminded me my professor.

Oh, yeah, I was rambling.

"Trade works in a very simple way. I have something you want, and I want something you have. It's been made very clear that the headmaster wants me to teach DADA. Because in doing so I would be under his thumb. Because there is nobody else. Because the ministry is pressuring him. Because if I accepted, he would have the time to try to guilt-trip me into entering his war. Because neither the Board or the Ministry can deny my skill after the way I handled the dragon and the sphinx. Because he would be seen as the first headmaster to let a muggle-born teach, like he is in a position to let me do anything. But the point is, he doesn't have anything I want. So, no trade." I explained.

"You're a muggleborn too, it's your war too." gently objected the older wizard. "But nobody is asking you to go against death eaters, with wand and sword. Minerva agrees, we only want you to teach."

I snorted. "Oh, spare me the rightful justifications. There is always a war, or a dark lord, or a military dictatorship, or a child being abused, or a murderer walking free, or corruption in a government. It's not my problem. And what will happen when Potter will go in his next adventure? As a professor, I would have to protect him, and then giving him points for breaking the rules. No, thank you. And while I

honestly believe Dumbledore didn't know about the abuse, he is still raising Potter as a martyr."

Flitwick drank his beer in silence. Once we ordered the next round, he turned once again toward me.

"Yes, you've told me your theory. Every evidence you brought forward is circumstantial at best, and hardly anyone fault. Mr. Potter makes his decisions, like everyone." he reprimanded me quietly. "While Albus may not have anything you want, Hogwarts has much to offer, like the library reserved to professors and their apprentices. And while your friendship with Hagrid might be gone, the grounds and the forest are still there."

It hurt a bit hearing about Hagrid, but I liked the grounds. The garden room at Rabbit's Hole had become a whole grass field, with cherry and peach trees that would bear fruits in a couple of years. With only a little part of the surface used to grow vegetables, flowers had grown in bunches here and there, Raven could fly freely, and at least once a day, I enjoyed running in it with my fox form.

Winky, after years holed up in Crouch's house, found the work in Rabbit's Hole soothing.

"I have more interesting things to do." I repeated. And it was true! I still had a bunch of research to do with the dragon's parts, I had two dragon eggs to experiment with, soon Gringotts would complete the rendering of the sphinx, I wanted to learn why turning into different animals was impossible, I wanted to try some forge work, I wanted to fix myself an eye, and I wanted to carve a boat that could both fly and dive underwater.

"Are you still having problems completing your Gubraithian fire?" Flitwick asked me. "You know, if we were colleagues, I would gladly give you pointers. The others too if you let them onto your projects. I'm sure Minerva would love to work on multiple Animagus forms, Albus is far too busy to explore the limits of transfiguration." I snorted

at the blatant tentative to cripple my determination. He knew my buttons; I gave him that.

I thought about it for another thirty minutes, that we passed into a pleasant kind of silence.

It was true, Hogwarts could offer a lot. Not only what Flitwick just told me, but there was still Ravenclaw's diadem, that I didn't know how to uncurse while preventing the enchantments from unravelling, and the Chamber of Secrets, that probably held more than just a big snake. It was Secrets after all, not secret.

Maybe I could try and replicate the RoR.

"I don't care what the ministry does, my class, my rules. NEWT only for EE in OWLs and above." I started, before my Head of House could jump in joy however, I went on. "Wait a minute professor, I have conditions: I'll string together my notes, polish them a bit, add references and tips, tomorrow I will send them to you. You're going to pull strings and have them published in time for the students. The money will go into new brooms for the school, parchment for me, and paying a proper history professor. Binns must go. And I'll have a Time-Turner. I'll pass the extra time into the professor's library, when I'm not playing with magic with you or Professor McGonagall. We will research seriously, I'm used to thirty hours long day, so the professors that I'll research with will probably need to find a way to keep up. I need a house elf that will willingly bound himself to me, male, on the young side, not Dobby. Said elf will stay with me even after I leave Hogwarts. You and I are going to have friendly battle sessions twice a month. And I can harvest stuff freely. Wands aren't going to get their cores themselves." I outstretched my right hand, with my lone eye looking at my favourite professor.

"I can't promise anything about History of Magic. But we'll give it a try." replied Flitwick. We shook hands.

"I will teach to the best of my ability until we keep researching to the best of our abilities, the moment one of my colleagues slacks off, I'll

teach à la Snape."

The half-goblin laughed again. "Deal!" he exclaimed.

I'll end up abusing my time room anyway.

I finally opened my NEWTs results. It irked me that somehow my Head of House intercepted them. But, listening to the letter, I couldn't hear any magic, so it probably wasn't a trap.

Transfiguration: Practical: Theory:

Charms: Practical: Theory:

DADA: Practical: Theory:

(The theory of wand based subjects didn't focus on a list of spells to memorize, but on the understanding of the theory behind. So I wasn't penalized.)

Astronomy: A

History of magic: EE

Potions: EE Practical: EE Theory: EE

Herbology: A Practical: A Theory: EE

Care of Magical Creatures: Practical: Theory:

Runes:

Arithmancy:

Divination: EE

Muggle Studies:

(The ○ meant I was head and shoulders above the stuff students should know)

Well, I didn't attend a single lesson, so it's pretty cool. I thought.

I passed the paper to Flitwick, who was watching it with an eager glint in his eyes.

"Oho!" He exclaimed "Very impressive! Even if not nearly as much as your match with the sphinx, don't you agree?"

This time, we laughed together.

1995-01 September

I had an interesting summer. From Monday to Saturday, I worked with Ollivander for ten hours each day. He did not give me formal lessons in wand crafting, nothing like that. I followed him around and helped him either trying to give the first wand to an 11 year old kid or throwing him ideas for possible core-wood combination. I gained a constant flow of tips on every aspect of wandmaking. From the proper way to choose a branch from the correct tree, to how to carve an appropriate handle, to how effectively coerce a core to work well with a particular wood.

Once at home, I passed 8hours in the Time Room, in which I basically had 24hours to rest, research whatever, and rest again before another day with Ollivander.

Dumbledore gave me a flamboyant introduction, to which I answered with a wiggle of my fingers. I didn't rise from my seat. Professor McGonagall bristled, but Professor Flitwick, or Filius, as he wanted me to call him, just smirked shaking his head.

The ministry saw fit to place Umbridge as Supreme Inquisitor at Hogwarts from the very first day.

During the dinner, Raven stole me a chunk of beef and gobbled it down before I could snatch it back. I pointed my fork at her: "Keep doing that and I'll eat you."

She squeaked and flew to play riddles with Luna. I could have risen from my seat, but then every single student would have noticed my Chinese Fireball coat, and the dragon bones that protected my shoulders, no thank you.

My classroom was a big one. Almost vast. Circular, with dummies and blackboards arranged against the walls. At the wall on the opposite side from the entrance, a short staircase led to my office, that held a second door which led to my living quarters. From my living quarters, there was a secondary staircase that led to the seventh floor. I choose the perfect place.

I arranged the desks in two half circles, with the second one put on a three feet high stage. I wanted anyone to be able to follow everything. I promised to teach at the best of my abilities, and that I would do. Outside the classroom, I hanged the heavily modified syllabus for each year (I checked with Griselda Marchbanks, if I covered enough of the topics, I was free to tweak it to my preferences).

I was playing riddles with Raven when my first class arrived. Oh, Potter's group. I still had no idea why someone would pair Slytherin with Gryffindor in a wand based subject, but while I wouldn't have cared otherwise, how they interacted in my class would influence how they learnt. So, to keep my word, I had to shuffle them together. Before they could sit, I spoke: "Make sure to not sit with a member of your house either to your right or to your left."

Raven flew out of the window.

There had been some grumbling, but I silenced Malfoy and Weasley with a twitch of my wand before they could utter a single word in protest, so everyone noticed I didn't hold favourites.

I noticed there were several amateurs at occlumency among the Slytherins. Since everyone was stalling, I waved my wand, and a piece of paper with the surname of every student appeared at one of the desks. I took care to separate Crabbe from Goyle, both from Malfoy, and the infamous Golden Trio. They took five minutes to settle down. I put Granger near Zabini and Potter near Greengrass. Yes, the one I recognized from fanfictions, yes, she was adept at occlumency. I added 'how fanfiction influenced the canon potterverse' to my list of research topics.

Then I started with my lesson. "I don't care about your houses. In here, you are my students. Period. I'm David Taylor and I'll explain to you how it's going to work. Outside of the classroom, there is a list of topics for each year, the ones written in red are known to pop up often at the OWLs. The ones in black are topics I added because of reasons. While we will follow the broad strokes of your textbooks, in class we will work on the more practical aspect of DADA." I waited for a second or two for the joy brought by my revelation to be subdued.

"At the end of each lesson, I'll assign a reading. For the next lesson, you'll bring to me a foot long essay which will summarize the topic and contain your personal observations on it. And miss Granger, one foot means one foot." I shot her an amused glance while she blushed and bristled at the same time. When I heard something that sounded a lot like mudblood coming from Malfoy I kept my even tone of voice. "Thirty points from Slytherin and a week of detentions with Mr. Filch." when his expression turned outraged and he rose from his seat to protest I cut in with: "Do you wish for the points loss to be of fifty? And the detention to last a month? If so, go ahead."

He bristled but sat down. *That's enough for now.* "We will work on the proper way to apologize in the next month, Mr. Malfoy."

"Now, as I said, in class we will work on the more practical parts of this subject, because god knows if letting you practice stunning spells on your own is not a stupid idea. I'll leave the last fifteen minutes of every lesson free for you to ask questions. If you are

researching something we do not face in class, take an appointment and we will discuss it in my office. I could have added the names of the books about the topics in black to the list, like I have done for the first and second years' syllabi. I didn't do so because researching a topic will bring you through things you wouldn't have learned otherwise, and because in this way you'll learn how to properly study any given subject. One Saturday every two months, I'll prepare a room in which you'll work together to complete certain tasks. It could be keeping safe half of your classmates, disarming me, taking something from a place and bring it to another. I can be very imaginative, I assure you. I'll also make you work in teams of three, that I will choose, and shuffle once every month. Starting October, I will be giving extra lessons to learn how to cast a Patronus, open to everyone that wishes to attend them, if you are interested sign that piece of paper on the wall before going to your next lesson. I also suggest each of you take a moment and read the syllabus from the first to the fifth year. Make sure you know at least the topics in red." I waited for everyone to finish writing down whatever they thought it was important among the things I told them.

"Now, what exactly is DADA? You won't find yourself facing a vampire coven or a necromancer anytime soon, so let's focus on the Defense part. In magic, very much like in life, intent is the real power behind any of the spells the ministry will test you upon. In the syllabus there are a lot of different kind of spells, some are branched from a curious tweak of a transfiguration, some are simply charms. Examples?"

For the rest of the lesson, I challenged their understanding of spells, charms, and transfigurations, trying to give more room to breathe to the Slytherins, that managed to gain back twenty points. I waited patiently for Goyle to explain how he cast a lace knotting charm and had him think out loud to his applications. We took five minutes, but he gained ten points for an 'aptly put consideration of the dangers of wearing laces'.

I was lucky to have a double period. And I was almost having fun, I felt like I was modifying the stats of NPCs in a game.

Then I had them demonstrate the disarming charm. Disaster. Bar Potter, nobody had the proficiency necessary for an Acceptable at the OWLs. I put Potter against a mannequin explaining him how to cast silently, before walking around and correcting their pronunciation or wand movements. "Intent is important here. If you have a dream, something, or someone you wish to protect. If you don't disarm the one in front of you, they will take away what you hold most dear. Find that determination and push it into your spells." My pep talks are getting good. After that explanation, a lot of people started casting fast. Aim wasn't really a problem with people staying still in front of each other but having them moving around while casting was a possible idea. I whispered something to Neville while under a cloud of not-eavesdropping charms. Five minutes later he disarmed his adversary.

At the end of the lesson, everyone signed up for Patronus lessons.

When everyone was about to leave, I spoke: "Miss Greengrass, Mr. Potter and Mr. Longbottom, stay behind a moment please."

They glanced at each other before walking to my desk.

"Mr. Potter you are far too advanced for this class. I can do one out of two things. I put you with sixth years, or I give you a lot of extra material to self-study that we will discuss on weekends, if you choose the latter option, I will have to put you against team of three members during our practical's. Either way, this class only holds you back, but you will still participate in the Saturday's Hell Games along with your classmates."

He stammered something along the lines 'I'm not that good'. I stopped him. "You already know the difference between a classroom and the real deal, and not only because of the Triwizard, we both know it. You won't be left alone to fend for yourself but holding yourself back only in fear to leave your friends behind does a

disservice to you and them both. You want to protect them all, but to do so you should try to live up to the potential you've been squandering until now" I kept a very kind tone all the time, he didn't look convinced. I let him go, he would give me an answer in my next lesson.

I had Neville take a deep breath, focus, and disarm once again the mannequin. "That wand does not sing for you, Mr. Longbottom." I said while unrolling a 15 inches high band of leather. Inside there were all my creations, from my first (olive and unicorn tail hair) to my last (yew and dragon eyestring). I took up a delicate-looking one: "Twelve inches of willow, with a sphinx heartstring. Kind and protective, with the not so well tamed lion's aggressivity. Only apparently bendy." I had him cast the disarming charm again.

The mannequin lost his whole arm. I took back the wand: "This weekend I will accompany you to Ollivander, where a wand will choose you. The one you have will serve you well as a secondary one."

He tried to protest, but I talked him down with the promise I would write to his grandmother and sort things out. I shoed him to his next lesson.

I turned toward miss. Greengrass. "You probably know that I can't legally teach occlumency." She raised a single eyebrow. *Damn if it isn't unnerving seeing a fifteen-year-old girl with a blank face.* "When I started learning occlumency, someone started poking around on my surface thoughts, from time to time. This person would then nod when I answered properly and rub his or her chin when I didn't. Coincidentally, I started getting much better, very fast, because I knew when I wasn't having success."

She was staring at me with wide eyes. Probably her parents were teaching her, but occlumency required a lot of dedication over a long period of time. Having a constant check would help a lot and find any flaws that would otherwise have time to become ingrained in her mind. She slowly nodded. I would have winked, but I still had only

one eye, so a grin had to do. "Then you should go to your next lesson. Oh, and an absence of facial expressions is an obvious tell you're hiding something."

The lessons kept going well. I thought my approach was very effective. With the first years I focused on 'how to not kill yourself with stupidity', and I got the second years to learn how to use the charms of their first year as a way to defend themselves, like using Wingardium Leviosa to float a desk in the path of a spell. With them I was pedantic. Third and fourth years all came soon to either love or hate me. Research was a battle to win in order to gain knowledge, and I had to prod several of them in order to not give up. A few blossomed, adopting a random pattern of research that I encouraged them to discuss with the various professors, or even myself.

Potter choose to stay with his classmates and work on things I gave him to do.

Even if nothing groundbreaking, there had been several original ideas or approaches in regards to this or that topic. I shamelessly devoured every idea, shuffling it with mine, before discarding it or improving it until it was something completely different.

When a fourth year Hufflepuff gave a snide comment about 'Looney' I wrapped him into an illusion and for the rest of the hour, he took pointers on proper duelling stances from a chair. At the end of the lesson, I freed him and then asked the whole class if they were sure that what they were looking at was real, before vanishing like smoke in the wind. At least in their eyes. Luna's distant smile turned into an impish grin.

Several professors asked me about why so many of their fourth years had an existential crisis. I laughed in their faces and blamed the Daily Prophet.

I had a harder time with the NEWT students. No, I couldn't teach them how to summon a thunderstorm. No, even if they asked nicely, I wouldn't allow them to learn cursed flames. Yes, I honestly

expected them to be able to accio their own wand using their casting hand. No, I wasn't going to teach them how to use a sword.

It was harder for them to see me as a proper professor, since even if we weren't acquainted, they were just a year behind me at school. But they signed up for DADA's NEWT under their own free will, and so they were, while often joking about it, willing to learn. Our relationship was more that of one older student guiding younger ones than a proper professor-student one.

I was trying to teach everyone how to think. Because I was appalled that there were people around able to summon rain but that wouldn't stop for a second and think about the floods they would cause.

Hermione Granger was often in my office asking me about this or that tidbit of magic. I was glad to point her in the right direction. While her approach to magic was a bit... cold, and she wanted to learn things mostly to get high marks and to be praised by the professors, thusly proving to both the world and herself that she was worthy of magic, I couldn't deny she was driven. She would never be able to be one element, because she didn't let herself feel, she could still become a fearsome witch. It was a pity that the truly magnificent enchanting needed emotion. In one of our talks, I asked her that when shit hit the fan, she was to come to me and ask for help. I could only hope.

As a professor, I was granted minor access to the wards. I used that access together with my illusions to protect my students. The castle subtly reinforced those, since a very important part of the intent that had been soaked into the stone that made it had been protecting the students from the dangers outside. Umbridge was in Hogwarts on the ministry's authority. The castle couldn't care less. Basically, the hateful woman couldn't find my class, and a thing or another happened during mealtimes so she kept not noticing me.

So, teaching worked well.

The teaching staff-only library was obviously much smaller, and a real treasure trove. There was an entire section made only of unpublished works and abandoned researches, all original stuff written by Hogwarts professors since half a century after the founding. Here that I learned that the Madam Pince everyone saw in the Hogwarts library was, in fact, a golem. Irma was always working into the professors' library, she knew a lot of shit, and was always reading this or that work. It was a pity she couldn't produce a single original thought, but she was able to string together facts nobody knew a single thing about, and thusly finding really interesting patterns. The books in that library were very advanced and tended to give a very subjective point of view on each topic. I had to learn Old English and gain a working knowledge of both Latin and Greek.

From Monday to Friday, after dinner, I slept a couple of hours before going back in time with Flitwick, McGonagall, or Babbling. Then we would research stuff old and new for five hours straight. I would then go to sleep in my Time Room, where I would also go over the students' homework. I would leave the Time Room around dawn to walk into the Forest or around the Grounds, or to poke around either the access to the Chamber of Secrets or the RoR. Then breakfast and another day of lessons. I had to hold the same lesson twice for every year, since the classes were split with students from two houses at the same time. At least I had to hold NEWT lessons only once. Being one of the core subjects, I ended up teaching 40hours every week. And that was without the one on one talks about magic I held on Saturdays.

I had no idea how others managed it without a Time Room. *Eh, they must love teaching.* Then I imagined Snape. I laughed. I often spent whole the whole Sunday in my Time Room. Basically, I had three Sundays every week. I also kept copying down interesting books from the Hogwarts library (the part opened to students and the restricted section both) and the only-for-professors material.

My new house-elf, named Tummy, made sure I ate enough and slept the appropriate amount of time.

Irma was often around to help organize the work. It was then that I realized that to reach the top in any given field of magic, you needed to be at least a bit obsessed with it. And while I knew I was obsessed with... well, everything that was even remotely related to magic, the professors I worked with were the same as me, even if only on their respective fields.

After I completed the Perfect Gubraithian Fire, that I put at Rabbit's Hole in a stone basin (for Winky's joy it didn't produce soot), Flitwick and I started working on the project Prometheus. We wanted to craft a spell that would bring into life an animated flame that would smother Fiendfyre. We still didn't know if trying to develop something that would encase the cursed flame and let it eat itself, or a spell that could satisfy it with a split second of something that would pacify the hunger that Fiendfyre was built upon. He sent me a stern look when he discovered I could safely cast it. Working with him was humbling, his mind was like a hammer and a drill at the same time, unrelenting.

What I also experienced in our mock-duels was that, against him, I could only react, oh sometimes I landed a hit, or even won, but it exhausted me, while he was ready to go after 5minutes.

With McGonagall I was facing the Multiple Animagus Form problem, it was an old one, we weren't the first to try and understand why I couldn't be both a fox and a hawk. Once we had that answer, we could work on a way to circumvent it. We started with where the mass goes when we turned into our other form. Why do we keep our clothes and wand with us simply focusing on feeling them as a part of us? I also suggested working out the Patronus angle: while often Animagus and Patronus forms were one and the same, it wasn't always true, like in my situation. Did that mean I held an affinity also for the albatross? If yes, how should we bring it out? If no, what determined it? For this part, we also asked Flitwick's opinion. When I suggested her, we should look for a way to learn parseltongue, just to see if it could bring forward an affinity for snakes, she made such a horrified face I cried. Hilarious.

She also told me she was too old to use a time turner every week, so we often ended up studying together on Sundays. She was an old cat used to her independence, so I didn't whine too much. When she learned Filius and I were having duels, she insisted to act as a third observer. She basically laughed at my errors.

Babbling and I played with enchantments. While I anchored almost everything with Norse Runes carved with magic through my wand, she wrote them with her bare fingers, and from time to time I could notice her writing an array with her right hand while jotting down stuff with her left.

During the year, I was also exchanging letters with Fleur, who had kept researching and sent me an enchanted pair of wireframed glasses (with neutral lenses) that made you listen to music through the vibration that run long the bones of my cranium. So, my ears kept hearing the world around me, I also had the Beatles singing in my head. She wrote in her letter that they were the only half-decent thing the UK ever produced.

Since I had already tried the 'conjure a snake-imperious him to open the Chamber' routine, I was determined to become a parselmouth. So, I thought: How does someone become a parselmouth? I naturally started thinking about the only two known ones that were coincidentally in Britain at the same time. Ok Voldemort inherited it so I really couldn't use his method. Harry Potter, however, did not receive his ability through blood (And yes, I researched his mother family tree, Lily Evans wasn't secretly a Slytherin Heir. Honestly, the bullshit people write in fanfictions). And while I really didn't want to eat the soul shard in Ravenclaw's diadem, it was a possible path to walk down. There were several books about souls in the professors' library, but quite obviously there wasn't a ritual ready for me on 'How to safely absorb a specific skill from a soul shard without dying, going mad, and destroying the body of the artifact' that would have been useful, but there is luck, and there is poor plot development (yes, I was thinking about a lot of fanfictions I had read in my first life).

Before trying anything, I had to understand exactly what parseltongue was. It was quite clearly a very subtle, very powerful magic. Since in the books snakes actually spoke with Harry and understood his answers, when a 'speaker' interacted with the slithering reptile, he probably imprinted a measure of intelligence into the otherwise normal animal.

In my understanding of magic, the soul-voice of a parselmouth could touch the soul of a snake and giving it something that gave the reptile the ability to think like a human.

All the shit I did to hatch Raven wasn't going to fly in this case. I refused even to think about getting myself another familiar, since my white feathered friend would eat my last eye, mixing unicorn and human blood with memories and an experimental potion had been a stroke of madness-genius-luck.

It stood to logic that if a parselmouth could give something to a snake and enable it to 'speak' it could do the same with a human. If I could manage to listen to the magic while Potter spoke with a snake, I could try to isolate that sound (that would be 'parselmagic') and try to twist my magic, my being, to mimic it. That twist was not, however, something you could do without a second thought since your magic is your soul-voice.

That's another reason people are skittish around dark wizards and witches. To use magic is to use the soul-voice. Intent is important because is the only thing that directs your soul-voice. If your intent is always to tear, destroy, kill and otherwise cause pain, your magic naturally twists ever so slightly to better accommodate your intent. It's more like muscle memory than anything else. However, the changes in your soul-voice naturally bleed over your soul, which is your identity. And who you are guides the more instinctual direction in which your thoughts move. And so, using magic based upon the intent of violence (stuff that everyone calls 'dark' magic) carries the risk of generating a 'positive feedback loop'. From that process comes the abused expression of 'losing oneself in the dark arts' or 'falling to the dark side'.

Twisting my soul to adapt to parseltongue was similar to the twist one applied to his own identity to assume his Animagus form. And there I was hit by a stroke of genius. Salazar was likely a snake Animagus that managed to walk the thin line between twisting to assume his animal form and keeping a hold of his own human identity.

He then probably performed a very dangerous, very original, very costly blood ritual to give the potential to become a snake Animagus to all of his descendants, while finding a way to stabilize the walking on a tightrope process that was keeping a hold of your humanity while being about to become a snake. Aesculapius had a snake familiar, so Salazar hadn't been the first Parselmouth, just the only one to force that ability to bond with his blood.

After weeks of meditation, I conjured an arctic fox in Minerva's presence and gave it a rasping bark.

The fox yapped back: "Speaker?"

"Run around the woman than jump on the table." I growled. The fox obeyed. I tried and made it work with dogs and wolves. Minerva learned how to speak with cats in three days. But in my defence, she had more experience with being an Animagus. She could also speak with kneazles, even if they didn't have to listen. But it made sort of sense. I could talk with dogs and wolves, ordering them around was a different kettle of fish. But maybe it was because they were naturally more intelligent than snakes, so it was inconclusive. Minerva could order around every race of domestic cat. She could speak with a lion, or a jaguar, any feline really. But only the domestic cat obeyed her wishes, if being a bit sassy at times. Her words, not mine. We polished the results of our research and put it into the professor's library. We published a short, but intense book on animal-speak. It would be interesting only for other animagi, but with enough time it would take away a lot of mysticism from parselmouths. We sat in an interview for Transfiguration Today, in which we gave the gist of our explanation. We made the first page: a one-eyed fox with a tabby cat seated to drink tea.

The new plan was convincing Minerva that while we had proven that being a parselmouth was A-Okay, the fact that the ability travelled through the Sōwilō shaped scar into Harry Potter was not a good thing. She agreed, and we started meeting weekly with The Boy Who Lived to sort it out. It was very hush-hush, since the personal nature of the problem, even Dumbledore didn't know, and we most certainly didn't want Umbridge to find out. 'Mad young professor experiments on Liar Student to revive the Dark Arts!' yeah, I could already read the Prophet first pages.

That busy and wonderful routine lasted for two whole months.

1995-31 October

She did it. She cornered a student, dragged him to detention, and made him write stuff with her blood quill. I knew it was only a matter of time before it happened, and I was prepared, but still. All of this because the slander campaign against Dumbledore and Potter wasn't enough for a Ministry led by little and fearful men, who dared threaten the human right to think what the fuck they want. Oh, I agreed that a lot of people didn't really want to think for themselves and preferred to have others do their work for them, but I was trying to teach everyone how to think! HOW THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO WORK WITHOUT SPEECH FREEDOM!

So, when I noticed a bandaged right hand during dinner, I rose from my seat and slowly walked down the Gryffindor table.

"Let me see." I said, while unwrapping his hand. I must not tell lies.

I put my other hand on his shoulder and asked a single thing: "Who?" I was beyond furious. He was a child for the love of Merlin. My voice had been calm and collected, my face carefully blank. I didn't really hear him answer, I had blood rushing into my ears. But I read his lips. I looked to the nearest prefect, and spoke, one again with the sort of heavy calm that comes between the lightning and the thunder. "After dinner you will walk your housemate to the infirmary, where you will make sure he listens to whatever madam Pomphrey

says." after I said that, I pulled a jar from a pocket that shouldn't have been able to contain it. "This is murtlap. Keep it on the wound as much as you can."

I then walked to the professors table. I noticed that the Hall went quiet. My wand was in my hand, and in a split second Umbridge was bound, gagged, and without her wand. I had to control myself to take away her wand instead of her hand. "She hurt a student. I need a fireplace that opens in Madam Bones' office." Dumbledore's eye was no longer twinkling merrily.

10. chapter 10: The path of knowledge

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

1995-25 December

Tummy woke me from my slumber. I never really appreciated the winter holidays. That they began on winter's solstice, however, and at least that year, it had been a blessing.

I spent enough time listening to Potter talking to a snake that I was able to distinguish the strand of magic that made someone a parselmouth. Devising a ritual to learn it from the cursed Ravenclaw's diadem had been much more difficult. I performed it on the equinox, with Norse runes and the most brilliant application of Gubraithian Fire ever conceived.

I performed it under the stormy sky, over the Dover's cliffs. I transported my Eternal Flame in the centre of a stone circle before writing the runes in a blue fire on the wet grass. I put down the cursed diadem before storing away my wand in my iron trunk, that was left outside the stone circle along with my clothes. It was fucking cold. Raven left my shoulder after an almost kind nibbling of my ear. I didn't ask for suggestions; I didn't want to be spooked by something that wouldn't make sense anyway. I then cut my right palm before walking on each of the runes letting a specific number of drops of blood fall on them.

The first had been Raido. The rune for journey, with three drops of blood: one for me, one for Voldemort, and the last one for the one to win. My intent turned it into a promise, only one would complete the journey.

Then it came to Kenaz with Thurisaz. The first for inspiration, growth, creativity, revelation, the second for change, catharsis. With a single drop of blood: my end goal was to learn parseltongue.

It then came to Dagaz: dawn, breakthrough. With five drops of blood, my intent put my life on the line. Lightning, Wind, Water, Stone and Fire would forge me in this ritual.

Ansuz, like always, was the path I was walking, and the one that was more like me. Knowledge, Enlightenment, True Vision. Painstakingly, 21 drops of blood found their way to the rune: seven for all the things that could not be truly hidden. Sun, Moon, Truth. That were also Life, Magic, Knowledge.

Lastly, I traced in blood the Isa rune on the middle of my forehead: psychological block to thought.

I grabbed the diadem with a bloodied hand and put it on my forehead, across the rune. I let the soul shard inside begin to seep into my mind, looking for the strand of magic that I recognized as parseltongue. I felt him crawling his way through my thoughts and my memories, but I couldn't let that distract me. He had been insidious, there was no pain while he invaded my mind and attempted to enslave my soul. When I recognized the potential twist that was parseltongue I listened to it so hard that I forgot what I was supposed to be doing. I wrapped myself around the twist-not twist, pressing my being against it until I felt it leave an impression on me.

But then I wasn't me any longer, who was I... Not-Tom Not-David stood there breathing slowly, trying to be.

Then he saw the Fire, and some of not-him wanted to enter it while some of not-not-him feared it. However Not-Tom Not-David knew one thing, it was that that instant in time wasn't a moment for fear. He felt the weight and the meaning of runes on which one part of not-him had spilled blood. They were part of a flow that wanted to bring him in a very clear direction. But the rune on his forehead was a stop on the road, was a wall of ice. Beyond that roadblock, there was the fire.

Not-David Not-Tom knew that not-him had been the one to prepare the runes, but not-not-him never used runes in this way. However, he

knew that the greatest magic was often brought into being by an act of faith. Not-David Not-Tom didn't remember faith in what, or who. But something that both not-him and not-not-him agreed upon was that Not-Him should perform great feats of magic.

Not-David Not-Tom pushed forward, and entering the Flame, broke through the Isa rune. Then, Not-David only knew pain and scorching, annihilating flame.

I awoke naked in a stone basin, with my Gubraithian Fire covering me, warming me, protecting me from the rain and the cold wind. I rose, holding my head between my hands. I hurt.

"Winky" I grumbled. She appeared with a pop followed by her "Master called!"

"Put everything back home will you, and put me into bed, and this into the first floor of my trunk." I told her, handing over the Ravenclaw's Lost Diadem. There would be time to see if my ritual worked, but not immediately. Then I blanked out.

I spent the next few days hurting for being alive. But that happens, I supposed, when you entangle your soul with another, let the other leave an impression on your very being, and then set the other on metaphysical fire while you were still together. I meditated continuously just to feel like me once again. I didn't even want to think what my wand would do to me if I changed for the worst. Raven had been very complimentary of my stupidity. I checked myself thoroughly with one of the first forms of occlumency. I listened to myself, comparing what I found with what I remembered, but I couldn't be sure. In theory, the Perfect Gubraithian Fire is you, and while it does not actually behave like fire in the sense that does not actually burn, when put in conflict, however, it behaves like something alive (mirroring you) and consumes the not you.

I raised my wand, letting myself meet her and waiting for her judgment. Everything felt right. Like it was always meant to be.

So, I performed an experimental blood ritual. And now I could even say it worked!

I was glad I prepared the Christmas gifts with weeks to spare. I went all out with those.

I transmuted and enchanted a cat made of obsidian for Minerva that should answer to simple commands in Feline-Tongue. It would also spit a hummingbird that would fly around for a little while if you pulled its tail.

Bathsheba Babbling received a Rubik's cube I made. It was of wood and held a rune on each of the 54 little squares. I managed to put seven enchantments on it that would mesh and shuffle with each other in a pattern that followed the different arrays that would take form on the faces of the cube. Along with it went a list of what I exactly had done to it. It should be safe, but enchantments were not meant to work that way and could become... explosive.

Flitwick received a bottle holding in it what looked like a thunderstorm. The note I sent with it said that the glass was charmed unbreakable, but to make sure to hold on the cork for dear life if he ever wanted to direct it against something he didn't want to exist any longer. I was proud of my military might.

To Ollivander I sent a necklace-portkey to a cave I personally dug and enchanted in the isle of Mann. There was all the necessary to live off the grid in a very comfortable way. With a few necessities to craft wands with a few cores and some wood, along with a project I copied from the professor library: a flute-wand. It was well over my head however, so it would be something that could keep him busy for the remaining part of the war. The word to activate the portkey was "Loki".

Luna received a seed along with a potion. Once the first got planted, and watered with the second, it would sprout quickly and become a cherry tree, already in bloom. I managed to send her present with a crane shaped origami. It was two meters tall and should have

exploded in a cloud of origami butterflies after having dropped the Christmas present.

Flitwick sent me a glass fox that could sit in the palm of my hand. It contained fire that flowed into it.

Minerva gifted me a spear. Yes, a spear. Two meters of spell resistant polished white marble, that would shrink until it was five inches long. 'To hold my growing hair in a proper way'. Spending every second of my free time in my Time Room had his price: while my ageing wasn't being noticed, my hair grew abnormally fast. Well, I was sure Dumbledore noticed.

Luna sent me a necklace made of corks. It felt... *like a smile*. I decided.

Babbling sent me a steel plaque with a runic array on it. It collected the sunlight that crossed it and turned it into a rainbow. And while it doesn't look like much, doing shit like that using only runes was madness.

Ollivander sent me a few wand cores that he thought could work well together. Like hell I was going to try to do a composite core wand anytime soon.

We discussed our presents at breakfast. The new Inquisitor sat there quietly, pretending to not exist. And while obviously Umbridge was still working at the ministry, I taught them that nobody hurt my students, period.

I learned parseltongue and the Chamber had been interesting. I stored away the Basilisk and its shredded skin, leaving a fang with a note if someone ever needed to destroy an horcrux. I also wrote down the position of each one of them. The ones destroyed at the current date had been crossed out.

Turns out that the only secrets the Chamber held were a few very old tomes. All of them about rituals, explaining things I already had

deduced the gist of, even if the one with the proper instructions to breed a basilisk was interesting. Hatching an egg under a toad during a full moon was bullshit. Why the hell would anyone believe shit like that? Obviously, there were runes and blood involved. The study on the 'pure art of necromancy' had potential. Otherwise, bones and a lot of collapsed tunnels.

In January Voldemort hit Azkaban. Our esteemed government blamed Sirius Black.

Ravenclaw's enchantments didn't survive the ritual. I would keep the artifact safe until after Voldemort was actually dead.

Our studies on parseltongue completed, I gifted Potter a dream catcher when I noticed the bags under his eyes. It should also have actually worked.

In March the ministry found out about a giant in the forest and used it as an excuse to throw Dumbledore out.

Potter almost went berserk there. I led him into an empty room and gave him a short one on one lesson on duelling. "Rage can help you on the short term. It makes you focused and it makes you act. But it also blinds you." I explained calmly, while slapping away a stunner. "Rage is the weapon of the fearful. You can learn how to use it, but it always attempts to lead you astray."

He calmed down after a while.

The Inquisitor was a paper pusher that nobody actually listened, even if he was officially the headmaster.

Minerva and I demonstrated that it was impossible to have more than one Animagus form, because you couldn't learn to speak more than one tongue. I technically branded my soul with parseltongue, so I could attempt it, but until I devised a safe method, I would not attempt to become a yellow anaconda only to find myself stuck among different forms.

I determined that the Curse on the DADA position had been tied to the Lost Diadem. And from there, I learnt about curses: they were an obscure branch of wards. Voldemort felt entitled to the DADA teaching position, and when he came to Hogwarts to hide Ravenclaw's artifact left a piece of him on the position. The gist of it was that his soul shard would challenge every professor for the 'ownership' of the teaching position. He had always been advantaged since the new professor would enter his 'warded space'. Ownership of something was the first requisite to ward it after all. Having said that, Voldemort was a genius of all things violent. The curse would simply be one of 'unluck'. Which, in a thousand-year-old magic castle full of hormonal teens that couldn't tell the tip from the bottom of their wands, along with being so close to a Forest in which everything with a limbic system only wished to, at the best send you away and eat-destroy you at the worst, turned out to be surprisingly effective. The truly brilliant part of it had been that the castle itself supported Voldemort's soul shard as the rightful professor. Why? Because Tom Riddle managed to bring the not-luck away from the students and tossed it on his own position. The castle was tricked into seeing it as a proper sacrifice made from a member of the staff to protect the students. Which was one of the more core intents that seeped into the castle while it was being built. In the 'eyes' of Hogwarts, Voldemort had protected the students for decades taking the unluck on himself. Only that he directed the unluck on the teaching position, that he held only in name. Brilliant truly.

That brought me to briefly study the idea of 'luck'. But I had my hands full at the time, so I left it alone. I would send a letter to Slughorn about liquid luck the next year.

I sent a letter to Fleur in which I explained my wish to travel, at least during the summer.

Raven started to teach other ravens how to properly curse in English.

With babbling I started working runes into my origami, it wasn't exactly something with great applications, at least at that level of

development.

I started winning against Flitwick three out of four times. Sometimes he and Minerva would gang up against me, and there I could only try to 'survive'. We were having fun, and to Minerva's joy, I used the spear she gifted to me here and there. It was useful against conjurations, since it would dispel them, but I had to wield it with both of my hands since it was magic resistant. Used in conjunction with my wandless telekinesis when I was surrounded by conjured animals however, held good results.

In my Time Room, I would re-watch our duels into a Pensieve, and I started to experiment with the theory behind magic that could bend time without a static focus.

Meaning that I wanted to be able to make a 'Time Room' that worked without the Room. I called the project 'Chronos'. Yes, I was a mad scientist sometimes, but I believed it was possible.

Applying to myself an expansion charm would obviously not work. Gravity would probably make me collapse on myself. Perhaps if I stabilized it with runes on the body? No, I would need to carve them in my bones.

I played some more with space manipulation: if apparating was compressing a distance before taking a step along it, what would happen to a spell that crossed a compressed space? It was a complex thing to analyze since people could dodge a spell apparating away, the obvious answer would be nothing. However, I studied no-apparition wards years before, so I started wondering if such a ward could be used during a duel. It wasn't that it forbids the compression of space, it only gave it a rubber-like quality so that if someone tried to apparate in it, he would bounce back, violently. What I wanted to achieve was something along the lines of compressing the space on the path of a spell before placing a no-apparition ward on it. It should expand suddenly while keeping the rubber-like consistency, flinging back the spell. Filius and I played with this idea for months, with Bathsheba's input from time to time.

After a lot of gruelling work, we made it. The truly wonderful result was something that could be performed under a no-apparition dome someone else casted. There were, like always, limitations. On Hogwarts Grounds we could perform the compress-ward-release compression routine that would effectively throwback both spells and ordinary matter, but only because the no-apparition ward of the castle was a dome so vast that it didn't even notice it. In the same way a forest doesn't notice if a branch of a single tree is pulled back before it being let go. That routine didn't work when the no-apparition ward you cast was performed in the proximity of another of comparable dimensions. And some spells just cut through it, why that happened was still a mystery. If someone knew about it, could anchor himself (and avoid being flung away) with a process similar to the Determination Rowling spoke of in the books.

I also got started on Necromancy. Now that had been very complex to reconcile with my explanation of animism. While an inferius was a puppet and nothing more, it was possible to summon the souls of the dead. It was actually easy.

Well it was, once you had a solid grasp of what souls were. Our identities unravel in the moment of our deaths and become part of the Whole once again. Using something that held a strong bond with the dead soul, it was possible to use it as a 'shape' that the flow of the world-soul could fill. I understood it so fast because of the blood ritual I used to learn parseltongue. The difference between the thing you called back, and the real deal was that the thing only behaved like the dead person you wanted to summon. It was more like a silver of world soul in human shape than anything else. It could be done using something that had with a strong bond with the one you wanted to bring back. The more strong the bond, the less you had to focus on the 'shape'. The shape you 'forged' magically, was not a heart-beating, blood-flowing construct, and you summoned something centred on being alive. That was why it usually tried to swap with your soul: it didn't matter how good was the 'shape' you prepared, your living body was better, and since you used your soul-voice to string together that thing, it would try to 'jump' into you. That

was why an inferius in which you bound a soul (again with runes and enchantments) became very fast a mindless hunger-machine, that knowing it couldn't be truly alive, settled for trying to dig its way into living humans. I couldn't summon Bat-Man soul. While with a deep enough knowledge of someone you could craft a very exact 'shape', it was the world-soul's memory of it that filled the homunculus you prepared. While assisted possession was explored in-depth, in this world I didn't know anyone (among the dead) well enough to perform a summoning and check on this theory.

Then I remembered about the resurrection stone. I suspected it was simply something that allowed you to bypass the 'shape' building part. But then, how to explain James and Lily potter appearing at Harry's side in the Deathly Hallows? Harry didn't grow up with them, he couldn't know them. And an inanimate thing couldn't forge a 'shape' to be filled in the world-soul. It wouldn't make sense.

Taking it would once more completely bullshit the potterverse plot. But I already went against it, so, in for a penny...

Strong emotions leave a 'hook' in the soul of the others. I thought. And it made sense: at his basis, your soul-voice (which is your magic) acts on your will. While reason is more often than not the one to steer us around, emotions are much more powerful, older things. They were primordial: without us noticing, they would make our soul flutter in this or that direction. After all your identity is made by all of you: thoughts, feelings, memories, dreams. Loving someone, hurting when he's gone, being in fright when he is in danger, could, at least in theory, make your soul-voice scream in the world-soul-flow. An identity unravelling could take a hold on this screams. And explained the whole 'those who love us never really leave us' routine. It was true in reverse: if a dead person held in life strong emotions-strong bond with you, he could probably use those to grab onto something without completely unravelling. Or maybe those emotions carved a 'shape' in the Whole that would fill itself on its own. The ones that first said that a man dies when he's forgotten were more spot-on than they could hope to imagine. While Lily Potter was obviously

very much dead, and her soul didn't actually linger in the form of a ghost, there was a shade of her intent wrapped around Potter. Emotions are the pinnacle of the evolutive process: 'run from pain-do things that bring the opposite of pain'. Anger toward what hurts you, Love to what makes you feel good. It snowballed from there and humans now held a lot of possible emotions to link with everything, every single event or person of their lives.

That brought me once again to think about gods and heroes of old. Was there a shadow of Achilles' identity whirling its way in the Whole? Memories are powerful things after all. I slapped myself: tangling with gods would come when I was older. The possibility of losing myself in searching the shadows in the Whole was very real, and I didn't have the faintest idea about how to properly search.

1996-23 June

I had been vaguely concerned. I did a lot of stuff, completely thrown the script out of the window, and yet we were still very close to the canon version of the books. Really, the biggest changes had been me as a Triwizard Champion and me as a professor. There hadn't been a dementor attack on Potter during the summer, and Umbridge had been thrown out of school before scarring anyone. My students learnt a lot that didn't learn in canon and were far more capable than what they would have been if they had only Harry as a teacher. I didn't notice his efforts into learning occlumency, but I did notice that he vanished in the night along with the Weasleys before the actual start of the winter holidays. Even when engrossed in my research, I had been tense. I only relaxed when nothing happened on the day Harry Potter sat his History of Magic OWL.

Sunday, I left the castle and reached Hogsmeade, before apparating to Little Hangleton's cemetery. It took me a while, but I found the Gaunt's shack. I have already explained that enchantments fade in a couple of decades unless you layer them during the 'forging'. Wards work only for things you 'own'. Such ownership is built with time and effort. If Molly Weasley learnt to cast wards, and put them on the Burrow, they would be better than the ones made by Bill. Why?

Because that woman was always doing stuff in the house or in the garden, and the Burrow would feel her as more... 'rightful'. It would be a subtle difference, mind you, but a difference still.

Voldemort came to the shack, killed the ones that owned it, dropped a piece of him along with a curse or two, warded it and left. But while it was true the a horcrux held ownership of the house, and kept the wards in place, Tom made a mistake. Horcruxes are a way to live forever, true, I still wouldn't recommend it. The soul does not perceive time. Time, that obviously was not linear, was perceived through movement (be it physical or not). Better, time is perceived through feeling changes. Your souls perceive time as a reflection of what your body, and your mind, observe. While the soul shards where magically sensible, meaning that they would recognize and react to magic, they were also still. In canon, Hermione read in Magic Most Evile that the soul shard was one and the same with its body. The body of horcruxes, as objects, couldn't perceive anything, and so, the soul shard was, for a lack of better terms, frozen in time. This had the effect of making the wards quiescent. The horcrux kept the wards in place in the same way my Gubraithian Fire would hold them in Rabbit's Hole if I were to never go back there. The 'Harry must go to Little Whinging to recharge the wards' routine, wasn't bullshit.

The shack's wards were asleep and let me through without a fuss once I spoke to the snake nailed on the front door. Parseltongue was the best. I made my way through the shack, looking around without casting anything with my wand, the reaction of the wards could be... dangerous. I brought my occlumency quality focus on the forefront of my mind.

Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it. Take the ring out without touching it.

I came back to my senses once I was again out of the shack, with a stone box in my right hand. I blinked.

I made it! I would stuff the box into my trunk once back at Hogwarts. I apparated back and made my way to my office.

When Tummy gave me a hastily scribbled note from Granger that explained they went to the ministry, I cursed. The twins hadn't left school, so they went along with their youngest two siblings, Longbottom, Granger and Potter. They probably organized this shit in the Gryffindor common room, so Luna didn't go. A silver lining if nothing else.

Dropping the box on the first floor of my trunk, I quickly donned my dragonhide armor, took up my stone sword from the office and made sure the spear Minerva gifted me was still holding my hair. I close the trunk and donned in its necklace form; one could never know. In the meantime, I sent my Patronus to Flitwick: he was to warn Dumbledore about Potter and the Department of Mysteries.

I used the Floo in my office and soon I was crossing the ministry's atrium. I've never been so glad that Raven started teaching other birds how to curse. She was a loyal companion and a welcome distraction, but she had no place on a battlefield.

Patronus messages, sadly, work only between people that hold a somewhat strong emotional connection, or if you know the general position to send them, so I wasn't expecting help anytime soon.

I was also thinking about the nature of prophecy. What were the odds that Voldemort would trick Potter in the only hours I hadn't spent at school? *Maybe Dumbledore is playing the long game* I realized. Because really, if shit like this happened anyway, the whole 'let him take his blood to come back to life' thing held a whole other meaning. I probably owed the old warlock an apology. He was still a scheming old bastard, but a brilliant one. It was like being forced to play cards without really being able to choose your next move. So, he was cheating, manipulating the deck. I put that thought away. While revealing, and truly game-changing, I had to focus on my wayward students.

I cast tracks revealing charms and saw the afterimages of the students running toward the lifts. The death eaters were probably lying in wait for their ambush.

I always liked charms: they were a brief imposition of your will upon reality. Needed to grab something? Will it to jump into your hand. Needed people to not really notice you? Will the stuff around you to be unimportant. Need to know who just walked in a place? Will the ground to remember what stomped on it, the air to shimmer around the path they have taken. This peculiar charm was more like a transfiguration in my opinion, but hey, I only study this stuff, the names were already there.

In short, charms were a direct approach that allowed you to change reality without having to perform the whole 'change the physical manifestation' of something into something else that was required in transfiguration.

I ran forward.

Seriously, I spent the whole year teaching them to mistrust the appearances and to think before acting. So, what is it the first thing they do when Potter has a vision? Act on the assumption that it's true. I sighed, reaching the spinning room. I tried a track revealing charm to see which not crossed outdoor they opened but the charm unravelled when it touched the doors' handles. I opened an unmarked one. Nope. I crossed it out before closing it and trying again. The marks on the doors had vanished.

Stupid security measures

I opened a random one: The Veil Room, I listened for a second. That thing was a scary mess of unravelling threads that gave me a headache.

On my third attempt, I had been successful.

Cloaking myself in shadows I crept forward. A silencing charm covered not only my steps, but also the brushing of my hair against the high collar of my armour, and the sounds made from my legs hitting the folds of dragonhide. It was more like a coat than anything else, really, cut à la assassin creed, with dragon bone plaques over my shoulders, and a flexible but sturdy stuffing made from dragon sinew protected my spine.

I reached the students when Potter was starting his pre-battle banter with Malfoy.

My students were surrounded. Knowing I had a little time, I started weaving illusions and transmuting several ice needles from the water in the air. I had no qualms about killing, why should I have? I would sooner be saddened by having killed the sphinx. Silently, I made my way to the backs of two death eaters, took a deep breath and unleashed death under the form of almost invisible ice needles. They hit them between the first and the second cervical vertebra, killing them on the spot.

In the following half-second, several things happened at the same time: my students were wrapped in a sense deprivation dome, my 'Aurors' started throwing spells at the Death Eaters and I unleashed a bolt of lightning that deep-fried one of the masked turds along with a huge thunderclap.

After the first half-second, I dropped the sense deprivation dome while landing between my students and the bulk of the death munchers.

"Stay together, guard high, reach the atrium, Floo to my office." I ordered Potter. I couldn't look at him, but I felt in the magic of the kids that they were calmer. I gave them orders in the same format I used during the 'war games' I held every two months during the year. It was just another exercise.

I couldn't look at him because I was busy. There were a lot of them and only one lonely me. Sure, three of them were already dead, but I

had to give time to the kids holding off 11 wizards and witches very adept at the art of using magic to destroy stuff and people. I didn't dare to bring fire into the equation for fear that one of them would wrestle its control away from me. I had to adapt and do it fast.

With a push and a twirl, I compressed the space between us and the death eaters, before placing a no-apparition ward on it, at the same time I pressed my soul-voice on me and my students, anchoring us all to where we stood. I let go of the space-compression. The death eaters around my students, along with the shelves of prophecies in the immediate proximity, were flung away like thrown by a sling. I didn't stop, I gave them space, now they needed time. I lifted my weight from my students while, with a feat of finesse anyone would be hard-pressed to match I used the humidity of the air to create microscopic crystals of ice in a pattern I liked, before letting the thunderbird feather in my wand sing.

From the spruce tip, a net of lightning exploded outward, each strand running toward a specific target. I threw myself forward with a controlled compression-ward-release combination where my feet were anchored. I slammed my bone covered right shoulder in the sternum of a death eater, before slashing my stone sword upwards and cutting off his right arm. Something flashed in front of my face and I only my trained reflexes allowed me to flick my wand to lift a section of the floor to intercept whatever that flash-thing was. I pushed myself back, protecting my only eye with my left arm: shrapnel in the eye would have ended the battle very quickly.

Probably the death eaters were either barking orders at each other or cursing at me or taunting the mudblood professor that came to save the wayward students. I never really understood why anyone would talk during a fight. If your focus wavers you could die! *Get a grip people.*

So, I kept going. I flung my stone sword in one direction before snapping another lightning in another direction. They threw at me concussive, cutting, bone-breaking, blood-boiling curses and one idiot even tried to use lightning against me. Parts of the floor or

prophecies moved around me in a whirlwind, intercepting their spells before being transfigured in goshawks and attacking the little shits in black. I realigned the ice crystals in the air and the lightning the idiot used against me hit his own comrade.

They were good, don't get me wrong, without the enchanted dragonhide armour I used they would have won in the long run. But I fought Minerva and Filius at the same time to a standstill (Only once, but it still counts). The death eaters also weren't used to having someone using lethal force against them and were probably spooked a bit by my feral smile. I was trying to regulate my breathing, but my howling laughter was making it difficult. And like against the sphinx, part of me noticed I was having fun. There is something incredibly refreshing into giving your all against someone or something that wanted to kill you. It was... honest. No tricks, no lies, no plans. Well I was trying to lure them in this or that trap, but they were doing it too and we all knew it. Researching was interesting, and it forced you to think in a lot of different ways. When you solved a difficult problem... it was like having found the nirvana, if only for a second. Fighting for your life was exhilarating. I had to reign myself in from time to time, collapsing the ceiling on our heads was a bad idea, but it was brilliant animating their clothes so they would try to strangle their owners.

Alchemy was my best friend. Redirecting my momentum kept my movements from being predictable, and that kept me ahead of them. They were almost painfully easy to read: curses and shields. One among them tried to use a flame whip. Idiot.

His understanding of fire was nothing compared to mine, so with a wave of my wand, the whip turned into a flaming phyton that ate its original caster.

I stopped when the last of them fell. However, out of the 11 I still had to remove; I only took down 3. Meaning 8 of them run after my students. Among the missing, Bellatrix and Malfoy. I lost my sword, but there was a left-arm I cut off at the beginning of the fight.

Good enough.

The 14 death eaters became 11 after my first assault, and they fought me while slowly leaving the room to run after the kids, trusting in the last three to put me down. There still were 8 of them.

I found them in the Death Room, they were far enough from the Veil that it didn't particularly put me on edge. I mean, I was tired, I had a broken rib, I couldn't properly move my right arm and still had to protect my 7 students from dark wizards and witches. Once again, my students were surrounded by 8 death eaters.

The kids were battered, but all breathing. The twins were keeping a ward on the ground... *marked with their blood? What the fuck? Oh, probably they thought about it after our discussion on warding and ownership.*

I thought they were asking about it only to learn how to prank better, I foolishly believed it was their only angle. Granger and Ginevra were back to back, keeping their wands raised holding several rocks afloat, to block killing curses. *Those are my girls.* Longbottom and Ronald were propped one against the other, spent, but with a fierce glint in their eyes. Potter had broken glasses and an ugly cut on his right cheek but held his holly wand proudly in his right hand, the prophecy clutched in his left.

"When we'll give our statements to the Aurors," I started, causing everyone to look at me "we will describe that ward as Family Magic ok? No need to spend seven years in Azkaban for experimental and highly volatile blood magic."

The twins snorted. "You're a tad bit late professor." they chimed.

"Where are they!?" shrieked Bellatrix. I turned my gaze on the crazy witch, pretending I didn't notice her until that moment. Psychological warfare is in the details after all.

"Oh, they earned their Acceptable, for the effort you know. But if you're looking for them, you'll have more luck checking behind that thing." I replied, rising the arm I cut toward the Veil. To spook them some more, I animated the hand with a twitch of my wand. I was holding it from the elbow, and then the fingers moved to point at the Archway of Death. The dark mark on the forearm was there to be seen by everyone. The kids looked a bit green. I once again cursed at my missing eye, winking at them would have reassured them but... *Maybe I could use it.*

We were still in the banter-phase of the battle, so I went on ignoring Bellatrix outraged scream: "I know that a friendly wink in this kind of situation would probably reassure you, but you couldn't distinguish it from my blinking, so I really don't know what kind of secret signal I should use." the limb I was holding in the meantime circled through an OK sign, thumb up, and it even moved the fingers mimicking a duck's beak. I was keeping an eye on the death eaters that were stunned by my display, but I grinned when I heard Longbottom guffaw. I bought them two minutes to rest while calming them with the sheer absurdity of the show they were looking at. Only using words and a parlour trick. I needed all the time I could buy too, even if my head was starting to ache, I kept weaving enchantments into the rocks.

"So, who do we have under these shiny tiny masks, I wonder? Our beautiful ickle little Bella doesn't need one, and with that princess hair Lucy would be recognized anyway... Ah the Carrows twins perhaps? No? Then we must have the three Lestranges all in the same room! Who are the last two..." I left my voice stall for a second.

That blood ward looked solid, so I spoke: "New plan, hold the position, don't leave the ward, guard raised, break the prophecy if they come close to one of you or they kill me. Your lives are the priority." The last tidbit was to stop the death eaters from using lethal force against me, it would make everything easier.

When fighting with the intent to kill, spells that would be acceptable even in a friendly duel would be twisted a bit and hold the potential to

kill, it brings the whole fight on another level. After a certain level, when you must not kill someone, you need to be careful to each of your stunners, because they could fling someone to crack open their skulls against a rock. Ant that it's only an example.

I once again became the whirlwind, conjuring white ravens to misdirect or take a spell in my stead, rising spears from the ground to impale someone while smothering the fire that would have otherwise swallowed my students. The death eaters in this room were on another level from the ones I faced in the Prophecies Room. And while there I could move freely, here I was forced to shield the children from ward shattering curses that would probably end up killing at least one of the Twins. When I was just about to kill one, another would force me to shield, either myself or the students. However, I bitch-slapped one death eater with the limb I was using like a baton at least twice, so I was somewhat happy.

Then the Order came. Breaking down the door and raining spells on the death eaters. I didn't stop running and left the death eaters alone, finding myself on the border of the twins' ward. I started raising my own shield: five pillars of rock rose from the ground in a circle around the kids. Runes in blue fire found their way on each of the columns, while a golden flame burned bright over my stupid students.

Only when I felt it take, I took a deep breath, while I was reorganizing my thoughts I spoke again: "Miss Granger and Weasley keep your levitation charms active." I stopped to grab Potter for the scruff of his neck. The idiot was running into the crowd. I shook him: "We don't have time now for your stupidity, Potter, stay put! Messers Weasley, this ward is going to kill you if you are not careful, I can help, but my influence on it is brittle. Slowly, let it go, first the ownership through the blood, then the intent. Steady, yes, just like that." I guided them through the process, trusting my five-pillar shield and the two witches to keep an eye out for killing curses. When they finished the work, they fainted. I pulled out a blood replenishing flask and ordered Longbottom to make them drink two gulps of it each, before closing

their wounds with a tired wave of my hand. It was then that I noticed two things: Potter was no longer where I put him, and Dumbledore was late. Ronald too fainted. *Fanfuckingtastic*. In theory, I didn't know about the Order, so I could hardly show trust in someone belonging to a group that counted among his members Sirius Black. I couldn't just leave my students on a battlefield under the care of one of the Order, only to go after Potter.

I noticed Black on the ground, with a knife handle sprouting from the right side of his chest. While he looked dead, and that was probably why Potter ran away, I could feel the fleeting spark of his dying magic. I sneaked at him a variant of the stasis spell I developed while working at the project Chronos. Same principle of my Time Room, sadly, it slowed down everything, if cast on myself would turn me in some retarded golem. Every seven minutes of real-time would be one single second for the unconscious form of Sirius Black.

I turned toward my students; I still didn't know what to do. Then I blinked: *I am an idiot*.

I removed my necklace and turned it into my loyal iron trunk before telling the kids that could hear me to jump inside. Hermione looked at me like I was crazy, but Ginevra just nodded before walking down the staircase. Longbottom and Granger followed, then I floated down the three unconscious students. Lastly, I threw my head inside, shouting: "They just need to sleep, I put a river in that direction, if you're thirsty. STAY ON THIS FLOOR, the shit I put downstairs is lethal for anyone but me. And for the love of Merlin do not cast spells, you could destabilize it and make it collapse. Are we clear?"

Granger appeared a bit startled, and I suppose they were still a bit out of it, but after having seen me raining death on the death eaters and use one of their arms as a club, she looked to be taking me seriously. That's enough for me.

The second floor wasn't actually dangerous, but it was my place, I didn't want people poking their unwelcome nose around it. And I

wanted even less to have students throw magic around in it. It could be used safely, it was obvious. But I felt safer by spooking them.

I closed the lid before putting it once more around my neck. I cast another glance around. There were still 8 death eaters around. *That is what happens when you don't kill them. At least cut away their legs. No, we prefer to be noble, and let others die for it. Idiots.*

When I reached the atrium, it was just in time to see Voldemort disarming Potter with a slash of his wand. What's wrong with this universe and the canon story? Seriously it's like I didn't even exist!

Even while I was thinking this, I was already casting. I yanked Potter toward me with a wandless summon from my right hand. My right shoulder was locked in place by something I didn't have the time to check. With a wave of my left hand, the statues on the fountain came alive, rushing to protect Potter, that was safely tucked away near the lifts. I sprouted a jet of water to my own face, to wake myself up a little. It had been a long day.

I got a grip in time to see Lestrage finish her whispering, and Lord Voldemort red gaze locked on me.

11. chapter 11: The Booming Thunder

Many thanks to lubabpaul for the beta-ing!

THE BOOMING THUNDER

When Voldemort looked at me, I knew three serious things. I also knew he didn't have a nose, but it seemed a pointless thing to point out.

One: I wasn't in a condition to fight for real from the start, he was the peak of military application of magic and I was tired.

Two: it was possible that Dumbledore wouldn't appear.

Three: Dumbledore said in the Deathly Hallows that Potter's wand absorbed power from Voldemort, I remembered the 'golden flames' stuff. And that wand was on the floor, forgotten.

I raised my empty right arm and summoned the holly and phoenix feather wand. Voldemort tilted his head, curious. I was curious too: I needed to buy time while I subtly directed a healing spell to my shoulder, so I started bullshitting my way through.

"I really don't want us to try and kill each other right now." I started. Voldemort showed me a lipless smile, he knew he would splatter me on the walls, and that I was aware of it.

"I'd ask Mr. Potter to introduce us but he looks a bit out of it, and I already know you." he liked that, his being famous, his magic stirred, like a snake under the sun.

"I bet you performed magic even before Hogwarts. And no, Dumbledore and I don't really talk, he is just my employer. I used to levitate stuff, set a paper on fire. Little things you know? But they were mine. They were proof I deserved to be alive."

He had been irked at first, but now he was looking at me with a new interest in his eyes. I wasn't pouring any kind of magic in my words, but I was hypnotizing him, nonetheless.

"I learned how to read at three, and I understood the idea of war at six. I knew that being... more than them, in a world like theirs, would mean becoming a military experiment. Muggles are good at weaponizing."

I was about to lose him there, that part wasn't like him or about magic enough. "I always found tiresome the other children, they started to gang up on me, because I would always be reading, or looking at the rain outside the orphanage. When they started slipping and getting hurt, they left me alone. And I was able to breathe easier."

I got him again there, the more I showed myself as a mirror, the more he would be willing to listen. From there the need for bullshit.

"Then Hogwarts came, I wasn't alone, I wasn't so special after all. But there was magic. And my wand chose me, McGonagall conjured for me a warm coat." He did his shopping alone, in his eyes I had been weak, and as such, I wasn't so interesting. "I arrived at Hogwarts and the Hat offered me Slytherin." that was bullshit, but he didn't need to know that. "I wished to learn everything, and to live for more than three hundred years, like Flamel." I got him back with it. "But my ambition was only for magic. The other people didn't really matter they didn't before, they didn't then. So, I became a Ravenclaw. And my classmates had all been a disappointment." I had him, he had been a muggleborn orphan in Slytherin, racism then was probably worse. "Flitwick took me under his wing when I proved myself to be, even among my peers, more." That was exactly him with Slughorn.

"While I was learning about magic of every kind, losing myself among the shelves of the library or walking in the Forest at night, I also learned that there were things I was forbidden to learn." I

laughed, echoing desperation I never felt, just to buy myself some more time.

"Imagine that, a government that doesn't wish his people to be able to hide their thoughts. A government that told me what I could learn." I shook my head; I didn't have to feign my disgust there.

"And the attitude of everyone. Treating learning magic as a chore, expecting to be spoon-fed everything, and never asking themselves why or how." I saw his red, slit eyes gleam. "And obviously I learned about you." he smiled again, he liked having his ego stroked, even Bellatrix noticed it, she kept glancing between us, trying to understand what was happening.

"And about death eaters that claimed the mark they took so proudly was the result of an imperio, and our gracious government took their money and called them victims. While their loyal brothers and sisters in arms suffered a fate worse than death at the tender mercy of dementors." he was focused here, trying to see where I was going, while Bellatrix started breathing faster. If she was excited for my calling her loyal or terrified at the memory of Azkaban I couldn't tell. I was glad to have Potter under silencing charm, I had built up a moment and any interruption would break it.

"I've grown to be as extraordinary as I promised myself to be, I spent every single moment in which I was awake studying magic. Understanding fire and lightning, stone, and water. The first September of my last year, at the platform the 9 and 3/4, I overheard a dragon handler saying something obscure about visiting the school. When Dumbledore showed us the Goblet of Fire, I sneered at the blatant Panem et Circenses Fudge threw at us to hide his own incompetence. But I also read that the spoil of every beast classified XXXX or above belonged to its killer. So, I knew I could at once prove to myself once again that I deserved magic, and I could gain the rare opportunity to win over a whole dragon. Along the way I also won a riddle contest against a sphinx before killing it too and learning even more." the part on 'proving oneself worthy' was himself freeing the basilisk into the school.

"I met paper pushers and people who called themselves wizards and witches, who only cared about getting a well-paid job in the ministry." I snorted, and Voldemort lips twitched upward, in what I dare say was sympathy.

"So, they could gain gold to buy things that would end up being the true owners instead. So that they could rise above on the social ladder only to spit on those that stood below." I spat on the floor, almost snarling. I didn't even have to pretend; all that shit was true.

"I even thought about changing it, you know? Leading the revolution that France had in 1789. Then I noticed that the one to promote the rights of muggleborns had been Dumbledore. They threw every possible honor at him. Chief Warlock, role at the ICW, Headmaster. Everything so he could stay part of their system. And now, half a century later, we don't have open blood discrimination, unless you're in Slytherin, obviously. And there isn't a single muggleborn as a Head of Department, and they are paid less and have to work double as hard." I was losing him, Dumbledore was a no-no topic, but I was almost there, I had healed my shoulder, and was now trying to 'explain' to the holly and phoenix feather wand that I needed her only for a little while.

"And I noticed Lord Voldemort's work. I read once again about how he came storming out of nowhere and tried to change our world in a swift, clean cut. So that werewolves could have real jobs, without being shunned for something out of their control, so that there could be a place for giants, so that students at Hogwarts and wizards and witches everywhere could once again live in the wonder of magic. So that if someone wished to mutilate oneself in a stupid ritual, he could do it. Until it didn't hurt others, what right do anyone but me to choose what to do with my magic?" I was bluffing there, but I was also making him believe that his propaganda was still strong, so he was interested.

"And I read about how Dumbledore was now so deeply part of their corrupt and broken system that he started his own private militia to contrast you, because even if he was part of the system he so

happily served, he recognized that it was necessary to move outside the law." I snorted once again, all the Dumbledore-bashing fanfictions I read were being slapped on Voldemort's face and he was happy to stay still and listen. I was also happy that Potter's wand warmed in my hand, giving me his allegiance, if only this once.

"I read old Prophets articles, and old detentions records. It took a while, but I put together that you were recruiting among old families, that explained to their young what they should be fighting for. I put together how Dumbledore manipulated his own students, in order to groom them into the new, young heroes his group of vigilantes needed. How he took among the Hogwarts walls a single werewolf child, when there were dozens, only to then send him among the others as his emissary, in the same way he used Hagrid, who he saved from being thrown out of Hogwarts, to talk to the giants. How he put James Potter as a Head boy ignoring the bullying and overbearing pranks he carried out. I put together old hearsay, learning how he didn't expel Sirius Black when he almost tricked a student into visiting a werewolf under the full moon. He was his pureblood from a Slytherin family on a leash." I sighed; my headache was starting to become bearable.

"I put together how you and he played your war over the head of sloths, that kept their head down waiting for a clear shepherd to hold their leash." I shook my head.

"It was there that I confirmed that I didn't care about the cesspit that is Magical Britain. And that I had been right all since I went in Ravenclaws. They don't deserve my efforts; they don't deserve a single spared thought of mine." I concluded. I couldn't be sure, but I had stalled him for at least fifteen minutes.

"So please, tell me why. Why do you care? Your magic powerful, your mind sharp, and you clearly have already carved your path to immortality. Why do they deserve your efforts?"

I had built my speech with this conclusion in mind, I had to know if he was a revolutionary described as 'evil' by the victors, or if was just a

very powerful psycho.

The horcruxes didn't do him any favours. While a soul is not something that could be quantified, and it could, in theory, be cut endless times, shredding a piece of yourself to put it into something else had heavy consequences. Listening to him, and knowing what to look for, it was clear that every time he took away a part of himself, he unraveled around the edges of the tear. Only the most important parts of him stayed solid. But the details of himself he lost with every cut were important too, after all each of us is nothing but the sum of our details. So, his mind was frayed, and I didn't think he could notice it.

He tilted his head, silencing Bellatrix with a single raised finger (she was obviously outraged that I would dare question her lord).

"A Hogwarts professor at eighteen. Even if you look much older." He replied then, his voice had a hissing quality to it that I would have found disturbing before my ritual. Knowing parseltongue however, made it sound almost friendly. I choose to bullshit him some more, because clearly, I wasn't going to give to an immortal the key to time manipulation.

"There are butterflies that once that they leave their cocoon only last from dawn to dusk." I smiled at him "Some of us burn fast, but much more brightly for it." I kept my voice calm, my mind blank, and my face serene. That confused him, I could see it in the minute creasing of his scaly forehead. He couldn't even imagine the idea of not fearing death. I didn't want to die, there was so much more to do, but I recognized that it was a distinct possibility. Perhaps in death I could use my soul-voice in one last great marvel and turn my body into a lich.

I saw him study my expression, trying to find an answer to a puzzle he didn't really understand. "You accepted to teach them. Why are they worthy of your efforts?"

That gave me pause for a moment, until I remembered how my job interview went. I snorted, before answering. "Filius asked me a favour. And I used this chance to try and teach them three things. I attempted to make my students see the wonder of it, to relish in the marvel of understanding. I attempted to make them think before acting, not trusting the appearances. I attempted to show them that with magic, the only thing beyond their grasp is the one they can't imagine." I shrugged, then added "And I could work on stuff with Filius and Minerva both." I jerked my head toward Harry Potter. "You tell me how it went." I added sadly. It had been a letdown discovering that he came here anyway. But I was a teacher, telling him what to do at every turn would go against the spirit of my contract. And I didn't want Dumbledore to find out about me knowing the future.

Lord Voldemort, who was proving himself to be a pleasant conversationalist, nodded thoughtfully: "Yes, I've been reported your... quirks." he smiled.

"I can relate with your disappointment." he then said, looking briefly at Bellatrix, that whimpered, being reminded of her failure.

After a second of silence, he spoke again: "You asked me why I do what I do." he paused. "You have a good dream. But I want more." and I could feel his magic stirring once again, he was done talking, and he clearly thought I have been honored more than enough by his answers. I agreed with him, mostly. I didn't expect to be able to talk him still for so long.

Maybe dark lords don't have many occasions to discuss philosophy. I reasoned. I was starting to run out of bullshit to spit.

"However, I'm told you took away six of mine, and... slapped Bella with a limb you tore away from a corpse?" he asked. He was actually amused by that, I could tell. Bella escaped through the floo.

"And nobody takes something from me going unpunished."

Then we started.

I hadn't dared enchant anything because he would have noticed and tried to kill me on the spot, so I had to work in the old fashioned way. I had no doubt he was one of the few that could tear through my compress-ward-release routine, so I didn't even attempt it. What I was sure I couldn't make work was the prior incantation between the two brother wands, I was not the true wielder of the holly and phoenix feather one. My magic simply wouldn't synch properly with it and everything would go to shit. I flicked my left wrist, returning my wand to its holster before starting to make the golden flames thing work. I couldn't really use two wands at the same time, not at this level. While it was possible to cast simple spells holding two wands, things like shield with the left and cut with the right, at the level Voldemort and I were battling, I would needed to be able to 'sing' two songs at the same time. Only that I had one single throat, in the same way, I only had one mind to dedicate to magic.

I tried once again to call for Fawkes. It didn't work, if it were because of my falling out with the headmaster or because the firebird was busy, I couldn't tell.

It was the time for Fire. I lunged forward, letting the Fiendfyre devour its path through the floor until he was about to reach Voldemort. With a slash of its wand, he turned it into a giant snake made of black, scorching ash that lunged at me. Ok all this effort on my part and the holly wand repaid me with that pathetic attempt?

I flicked out my wand, summoning the water from the fountain in a titanic wave that swept away the ash and everything in front of me. I put the holly wand away in my holster with the second and half that move bought me. It wasn't right for me, period. I could use it, but it would be a pain.

Voldemort froze the water before shattering it with a blasting curse that was also meant to shred me with the dangerous shards, followed by a killing curse.

A shard turned into a silvery shield that intercepted the green light becoming a lump of metal on the ground. The other pieces of ice

started flying around in a twister like fashion before the lightning started coursing through patterns made of microscopic ice crystals. I was the eye of the storm.

Voldemort didn't bat an eye at my display. He started raining killing curses on me before slashing his wand unleashing a cutting curse that would have bisected me at the pelvis if I hadn't rolled under it.

Jumping up I collected the rubble around turning it into a knight of stone.

Voldemort scoffed before throwing at it a ball of fire so hot it burned blue. I took the heat and used it to transmute the two meters high golem into iron, before turning the excess heat into kinetic energy that I used to push forward the golem that I animated before adding to it a Dagaz rune in the middle of his back.

In the three seconds I spent preparing my knight, Voldemort turned the floor under my feet into quicksand and sent at me four killing curses.

Taking advantage of the quicksand, I willed myself to be swallowed. A second later I exploded from the floor less than three meters from Voldemort, clutching in my bloodied right hand a stone club. Thank god for the featherlight charm.

My golem held his ground for twelve whole seconds before being flung away under the weight of Voldemort's displeasure. I swung my club pressing my advantage, while conjuring three goshawks that should have dived for his eyes but that exploded in a blaze of fire. I didn't even see him cast that.

But I was happy of my progress: we were walking toward the centre of the room, that meant away from Potter. I threw forward a blinding flash followed by a thunderclap silencing and bending the light around me in a haze of illusions.

Voldemort pushed his ward upward sharply, rising himself on a stone pillar that turned into a tree under my will that attempted to grab him. He flew on the other side of the room with what felt like a form of self-transfiguration.

The tree fell, and my golem made his way to my side while we stood still for a few seconds. I let the ice storm die down, before unleashing Minerva's spear from the knot in my hair and putting it in the hands of my knight. Touching his right arm with the tip of my wand, I carved into it an Ansuz. I hoped that Odin's rune, in conjunction with a spear, would give my golem an edge.

I felt blood flowing down the left side of my face. I stopped the bleeding with a touch from my wand.

I stared at my adversary. He was unruffled, even if I managed to tear his clothes in more than one point. All of that happened in less than five minutes.

"I lost many of my death eaters tonight." he spoke.

Oh, is this the recruiting office? I thought.

"There could be a place among mine with someone that clearly has wizard blood in his veins." he offered.

Yep recruitment.

I did manage to impress him. It was an extraordinary offer.

"We could rediscover the magic of old, rise a new Avalon from the seas. I could teach you the path of ancient druids."

Oh, he knows my buttons, I'll give him that.

I tilted my head. Pretending to be considering his offer. "You are a great wizard, no doubt. And we could probably find a way to rise islands from the depth of the ocean in less than 6months if we were to work together."

I rolled my shoulders, getting ready for the next round. "But there are three things that can't be hidden for long: the sun, the moon, and the truth." I went on. "And there are three of the latter at play here: the truth that you used pureblood racism to rally behind you the dominant class and used the muggleborns as a scapegoat. The truth that I do not bow. And the truth that you are a half-blood bastard who will always be more than any ten random purebloods put together. You shouldn't fall for your own lies."

He snarled at me before opening the dances with a lightning bolt. I would have tried to redirect it, but it was black, and I wanted to get away from that thing.

Dodging it, I rolled behind the fallen tree, before banishing it at him and rising once again my ice storm.

My iron golem lunged forward, using the opening I gave him with the tree I flung on Voldemort.

The Dark Lord redirected the tree to block the road of my iron golem and snapped a killing curse at me. The iron knight ran through the wood, spear held tight, and the green light unravelled the illusion that looked like me.

I snapped at him another lightning, before raising the rubble to shield myself from the hail of killing curses.

I regrouped with my golem and pulled on him another enchantment.

For five more minutes, Voldemort and I clashed. I was rapidly reaching the end of my tricks. He never fell again for an illusion of mine.

And that was the problem. He was a genius, he learned something from everything I did. After his first failed attempt at attacking me from my blind side, he stopped trying to exploit what obviously was not a weakness in my defence.

But in all of this, my iron golem kept getting better, because every time I was near it, I would enchant it some more. Which meant that he was fast, strong, silent, would shimmer out of view from time to time, but more than that: it was getting smarter. It was something I had been working on with Minerva and Babbling.

Unseen, the statue of the house-elf left his position at the lifts to creep his way toward Voldemort.

It was blasted away.

Then the Dark Lord came at me with Fiendfyre: under his control, it coalesced in the form of a giant basilisk and attacked. While someone that perfected his Gubraithian Fire can smother any kind of a rampaging hell, taming Fiendfyre under the control of his master was another kettle of fish.

So, I slammed it against the wall with an effort that left my nose bleeding, but it had been only to buy myself time: from a pocket, I took out a clay pot. That was the end result of my work with Filius: it didn't look impressive, barely thirty centimetres high.

When the fire basilisk lunged at me once more, I simply opened the urn. The cursed fire entered it like a noodle slurped by Naruto. It's an ugly metaphor, but I didn't want to go on the Italian guy-spaghetti crusade. I had been laughing against his death eaters; here, however, I didn't have any room for errors. I had to be calm and collected the whole time. It was exhausting, even if still thrilling.

It was then that Dumbledore hopped out of the floo with half of the ministry.

I couldn't resist. "You took your sweet time." I told them, before the headmaster started his drivel.

I was almost sad to put a stop to our battle. But I was really at the end of my rope, the last trick with Prometheus' Due had been something I was ready for, in the next exchange I would have died.

I turned my head to look at Voldemort, who was irked at the complete failure of his attempt on the prophecy. He glanced at me. He wanted to keep fighting me, I could read it in his eyes.

"Go home, Lord Voldemort." I told him. "There is always time for war."

He vanished in a strange form of apparition that I would study in another moment.

I could only keep standing, if I sat down, I would have fell asleep. "I need a pepper up." I grumbled. The enchantments on my iron golem where still strong, I had him hold me up. I was feeling like I was forgetting something.

Until Fudge came stumbling after Dumbledore, ordering me to explain what happened. I noticed the headmaster walking with at a brisk pace toward the end of the room. Whatever it was, he could handle it. I remembered I had, in fact, a pepper up in one of my pockets.

I ignored the minister and drank my potion. It would need a minute to kick in.

I kept standing silent until Madam Bones herself reached me, asking for my statement.

I looked at her with my lone eye, if she was irked by my attitude, she didn't show it.

"Finally, someone half capable of doing her job. Questions at the end of my statement." I started. She didn't like that.

"Two years ago, Sirius Black recognized Peter Pettigrew in his Animagus disguise in a Daily Prophet article." I told her. She blinked a couple of times. She kept her emotions under control like the professional she was.

Fudge screamed murder. I stunned him, ignored the wands pointed at me by the other aurors and went on.

"Seeing the real traitor of the Potters, he sneaked out of Azkaban to go and save his godson. When the truth was reported to minister Fudge in June, he ignored all the claims and swept it under the rug. Pettigrew escaped once his cover had been blown over, finding the wraith of Lord Voldemort. He then freed Bartimaeus Crouch Jr. from his father. Under Lord Voldemort's orders, " and boy, didn't I like seeing them all flinch at the name, " Crouch Jr. impersonated Mr. Moody and entered Mr. Potter in the Triwizard under a fourth school. He then went on making sure he would win. A ritual was performed on the night of the 24th of June, and Lord Voldemort gained a body once again."

I kept my best teaching voice during all of this, and it managed to keep Madam Bones from making any question or comment. Or it was because she understood that it would be the fastest way to get the truth of the events of that night, I couldn't tell.

"Our minister started taking even more bribes by Lucius Malfoy, who has always been a very votary death eater. It followed a campaign of slander, and the pathetic attempt of placing Hogwarts under our paranoid minister's thumb. You see, he believed Dumbledore wanted to become minister. The ministry put Umbridge in the castle, where she had my students use a blood quill because they dared think with their own heads. That woman had plans to use veritaserum and then the cruciatus curse on children."

At this one Madam Bones forehead creased. She couldn't just trust my word, but the picture I was painting with my words was far from reassuring. I noticed Dumbledore making his way toward us, probably believing his crooked beak would be welcome. I still owed him an apology.

"I'm sure you know Madam Umbridge didn't even pay a fine and kept her job as Senior Undersecretary. This afternoon I returned to my office from a stroll to find a slip of paper written by one of my

students. It informed me that seven of Hogwarts' children were going to the ministry tonight, to save a hostage."

I tilted my head toward the still prone form of Fudge. "Since the Headmaster wasn't in his rightful place because of that idiot. The wards didn't warn us about our students' field trip."

I took a deep breath there, not to build up momentum but because my golem's magic unravelled, leaving me to hold myself up propped up on the white marble spear.

"I reached them in the Hall of prophecies surrounded by fourteen death eaters. I removed six of them and lost my stone sword. I'd like it returned to me as soon as possible by the way. I had ordered the students to reach the fireplaces and to floo away, but they had been cornered in the Veil Room by the remaining 8 death eaters." I rolled my shoulders.

"Two of my students were holding an original ward that falls under the protection of the Family Magics Act. So, I scuffled with the remaining death eaters until a group of vigilantes broke in and made a mess of the situation. Among them Mr. Moody, Auror Tonks, Auror Kingsley, Mr. Lupin and Mr. Black, who is under a time dilation charm of my design and who needs the cares of a professional healer, one with a specialization in cursed knives would be perfect. And before you arrest them for vigilantism, I remind you of the attitude and general incompetence of the ministry."

There had been some outraged shouts there, but only from people in passing. The ones that stood there listening from the beginning wisely kept quiet.

I glanced at them with my lone eye, before turning my attention once again on Madam Bones.

"I lost sight of one of my students. I threw the other children in a safe place after checking their vitals." I looked at Dumbledore there, slowly blinking. I knew he recognized it as a wink.

"I reached the atrium to find my wayward student being ganged up by Voldemort and Bellatrix Lestrange." I cracked my neck, it was a bit stiff, before going on.

"I animated your fountain to keep the student safe, then bought you..." I took out my pocket watch from the folds of my red, battered, dragonhide armor and checked the time.

"40minutes to bring here your slow asses, during which Lord Voldemort tried to tear me to shreds. Questions?"

I don't know if it had been my tone or my posture, but at least two of the aurors around raised their hands as if they were in class. There had been lots of questions. When they asked to speak with my students I refused.

"I need their statements." explained Madam Bones. I couldn't bring myself to care.

"You need to declare the truth about Sirius Black. You need to deal with the fallout of Fudge's administration. You need to clean your department from moles. You need to properly ward your home, because being half-competent in a corrupted ministry makes you a target. And you need to keep the rotten hands of the ministry away from my students, or I will cut them off. Their rule-breaking and general stupidity will be addressed by their professors, and their families." I answered, mostly with a calm tone and a blank face. But I was getting tired of the squabbling, and still had six students in my necklace.

I walked to the nearest fireplace, using the white spear as a staff, "I expect my stone sword to be sent to my office tomorrow, or I'll come to take it back." I threw over my shoulder, and floo'ed to my office.

I walked slowly to the infirmary, helped Poppy organize the beds, before opening my trunk going down to collect the students.

They were awake and staring at me with wide eyes.

I rolled my eye: "Yes I know you heard everything from here, we'll talk about how to properly turn pre-battle banter in a weapon after Poppy gives you the ok."

In a flash of horror, I summoned the stone box that held the horcrux. I didn't really need to deal with a student with that shit among his hands.

"And I'll be telling of your idiocy to Minerva, just wait and see, her tongue lashing will hit you like a ton of bricks."

And just like that, I gave them back their everyday life. I noticed Granger gushing at me. I knew Emma Watson would be a knockout, but I really didn't want to deal with a student's crush. Even less when it was on me. Then all the fanfiction M rated in which she had been the MC flashed behind my eyes and I knew I was too tired to think straight.

12. chapter12: Field Trip

1996-26 june

The meetings with all the professors had been *boring* during the schoolyear. The last one was worse. We talked about every single one of our students. Like i actually cared if miss. Parkinson was good at reading star charts.

And we also were expected to discuss the possible career of fifth years. Or better, how to tell them, as the professionals we were, that their dreams didn't matter if they didn't sudy hard, and that it was too late to start in their sixth year. I suggested they started having the career talks after the second year. It would have made so much more sense.

When it came the turn of the fifth year gryffindors i had to stop Snape's ranting twice, because nobody else seemed willing to do it.

Thank good after Gryffindor I'm done.

I understood that playing double agent for Dumbledore could be distressing, but there is being tired, and there is being tiring. However we agreed on the last topic, so i butted in.

"We don't doubt mr. Potter and Weasley willingness to become aurors, Minerva. But while mr. Potter is talented on the more practical application of wand based magic, he still doesn't think before acting. And he won't learn it if he keeps getting it his way even when he clearly commits an error, or doesn't meet the standards everyone else is held up to. And mr. Weasley only has the drive to be part of the 'good guys'. They need to learn how to use their brain much more than anything else."

Snape shot me a look between surprised because I agreed with him and irked because I butted in.

I kept going: "Having said that, i won't be the next DADA professor, so it's not really my business. I'll be in touch if I remember to write, now I'll go packing. Sayonara"

I left the room without looking back, the seven of the Department of Mysteries where probably already waiting in the DADA classroom.

"You explained to me exactly what you did on the 23rd night." I started, and for the following hour, i explained what they did wrong and why. More importantly, i asked them what they should have done differently. I made them *earn* their answers. The twins had been particularly brilliant in their solutions.

We then went over my chat with the death eaters and Voldemort.

"Words are powerful. Attitude and words, when used together, can put the enemy on his backfoot even before the real start of the fight. In the Veil Room, I needed to collect my thoughts, I needed time to plan how to keep you all alive. So I tried my best to freak them out. With Voldemort, I needed time to heal myself and I hoped Dumbledore would arrive soon. So I used the truth to lead the Dark Lord around, I avoided cussing because i knew he is from the 70's and at the time they were much more severe while teaching how to be polite. I used little lies, and mostly i framed my assumptions in a way that made them look like i was appreciative of his attempt to conquer magical Britain. And I was able to save our hides because I used my head."

I didn't reprimand them about their stupidity. I had been right, Minerva's tongue lashing had been legendary. The twins had detentions until they boarded the train, Gryffindor had 0 points and the others had detentions already booked in september. Minerva was keeping Potter's wand until he boarded the train as punishment. He didn't really mind, Sirius Black had been declared free and with time he would be perfectly healthy, even if his right arm would always have somewhat limited movements.

I added a little black stone to Luna's bracelet. It was a portkey to Rabbit's Hole, it was password activated with 'Hare'.

I figured out the strange apparition method Voldemort used to disappear from the Ministry without having to break through the wards. It was a part of self transfiguration and a part portkey magic. Basically you turned yourself into smoke while making the smoke into a portkey. The wards reacted to a mass that travelled with *intent* in the case of no apparition wards, and to a *solid* hook (the portkey) that linked here with there in the case of no portkey wards. So it was a very useful, very cool trick. And you could drag anyone along with you, without risking mixing up your bodies, because the *identity* of your magic would not let the two smokes mesh together. I still didn't know what determined the *colour* of the smoke you turned yourself into, but I would figure it out. It couldn't bring me through the castle walls, but the grounds were fair game. It should even bypass the problem posed to teleportation into enlarged spaces. Because while travelling under 'smoke' form, you weren't really smoke, but a more metaphysical representation of yourself, without real mass. I doubted Voldemort truly understood how close he came to unraveling in the Whole every time he used it, or the true marvel that it was. I experimented with Luna. She became a springy green smoke-like form, I was smoke of a glinting steel grey colour.

The day before I had considered making my apologies to Dumbledore. Fate strung together Potter and Riddle, even with all my preparations I hadn't been able to keep them from their June encounter. Then I remembered that I was talking about Dumbledore and he would have turned my apology into a promise of servitude to the cause. *No thank you.*

I left a letter among Draco Malfoy's belongings addressed to his father, it contained a second missive addressed to the Dark Lord.

'The next time, let's conclude our duel. It's been the best I've ever had.' Signed by One-eye.

I had already gathered my things, and i had prepared a protean charm linked journal, Minerva and Flitwick had the twin. It would be a waste not being able to pick their brains for ideas, and I would honestly miss them.

I flooded to the leaky cauldron before making my way to knockturn alley, where I purchased the vanishing cabinet from mr. Borgin for five galleons. After all it was clearly broken and without its twin.

I apparated to Rabbit's Hole, where i introduced Winky and Tummy to each other.

I filled the food storage of my apartment-trunk with all kinds of non perishable foods. I added to the first floor of my trunk a hen-house, and brought in it 8 hens and a rooster.

It was decided that Winky would stay at Rabbit's Hole since she *loved* taking care of it.

I modified a bit the first room, rising a wall and putting behind it stuff I didn't want Luna to touch, like the dragon eggs and my more questionable books and notes. I adapted the glass fox Filius gifted me at Christmas to act as a door handle. Caninetongue was required for the door to my 'study' to open. Winky was given order to treat Luna as family if she ever dropped there.

That evening, i stabbed the ring with a basilisk fang. The soul shard died without causing problems.

Two days later i left my home with a jacket made of sphinx leather and I stole a motorbike, just for shit and giggles. Raven would find her way and I had already sent Kurotsuchi ahead with a letter. It would have been stupid to ask the ministry for an international portkey, and apparating that far was still beyond my abilities. So i pocketed my shrunk new motorbike and took a train, soon reaching Calais.

"I follow my brother,

who is much faster.

You can't mistake one for the other,

if he is the wit, i'm the booming laughter.

Who am i?" I asked.

She obviously chose to find me exactly while i was playing riddles with Raven.

"You look old." was the least expected hello i could have imagined, but I would take what I could.

"Hello to you too, Fleur." I answered in fluent french.

I drank the language learning potion as soon as I had reached Calais, a week before. I spoke with exactly two frenchmen, who gave me their best impression of people that could hate a perfect stranger because he spoke english. *Idiots*. English *is* the tongue you speak everywhere in Europe. Get down from your high horse France.

It took me only a day to reach Paris, trains were cool if you wanted to go around unseen, but apparition was still one hell of a trick.

"Well it's true." she insisted, expertly ignoring my mock outrage at not being welcomed properly. She sat at my table, ordering some wine, probably on the expensive side.

We were meeting at a café in magical Paris, in her letter she sounded happy at the idea of roaming around, playing with magic. I had successfully corrupted her. Oh, she still enjoyed being the centre of the attention, and upper class things like the wine she was drinking, but she finally recognized the difference between them and what was *important*.

"I hope you don't plan on me paying for that." I told her, eyeing the drink.

She didn't even answer with words, simply choosing to arch an eyebrow, before looking me up and down, probably searching for signs of financial troubles.

"I knew Britain was a disaster, but I expected a Hogwarts professor to be able to save up something." she teased.

"Oh, I didn't take any money, I find the idea of it troublesome." I answered, catching her flat footed. I grinned, going on before she could reprimand me "However I have three artifacts I could be... convinced... to study together. And that it's far more interesting don't you think?"

She smirked. She liked this game: "Oh? and what does it have to do with why you don't have any money, like a proper gentlemen should?"

"I'm a Wizard. I trade in magic, not the petty things fools find so worthy of their time. In this case however, I need someone that can teach me how to properly harvest a carcass of a magical beast." I smoothly answered.

She scrunched up her nose in distaste. It was hardly a topic that could accompany her wine properly. She should have known that I didn't flirt. If you and I had a common interest, we could talk about it for years, if we liked each other, like we did (as much as someone could come to like another only through one year of letters mostly about academic topics), I didn't see why I should subject myself to this running in circles. Seducing and being seduced is fun-ish, but hardly something important in a relationship. I gave her a whole year, and I looked closer to the thirties than to my twenties. I understood that she was 'young' to skip the teasing part, but, once again, I couldn't bring myself to care.

"Thunder!" croaked Raven.

The conversation turned into a less tense one after that. She seemed to have understood, even if she pouted.

Turns out she knew that the best armor shop in magical paris rendered its own creatures, and that they could be persuaded to let a client assist, but only for a price.

I had several thousands galleons tucked away in my trunk exactly for the occasion (thanks to all the Hogwarts students that lost money during the decades), but before I could explain it to her, she already decided to win a little dueling tournament that would be held on Beuxbaton's grounds in the third week of july.

"Why would you want to do it?" I asked her in an exasperated tone.

"Because it's your fault!" she exclaimed. It turned out that Headmistress Olympe liked so much the tournament for of age wizards we held at Hogwarts during the Triwizard, that she pulled strings to have one every summer in her school, open to all the ex-students and the occasional guest.

I would not enter, dueling is stupid. I would gladly let her compete, since this was a long field trip for me, nothing else. I would spend my free time modifying the calculations for my modified basilisk hatching ritual. She insisted for having me participate. And since I strongly refused, she wrote me in anyway. I could have given up, it would have spared me the hassle. But it would have felt like letting her win. And it was probably the revenge for my refusal to play the 'flirt me senseless' game.

Magical France was famous for two skills above any other: duelling and enchanting. It had been one of the reasons I willingly choose that country as my first step into the world. Not that France produced better enchantments, only that it produced *more* duellist and enchanters. Statistically there was an higher number of masters of the craft among them.

Magical Britain had however become famous, particularly in the last century, for producing *monsters*. Obviously starting with Dumbledore, then Voldemort and even our own Flitwick.

At the tournament I discovered I was regarded as one of such *monsters*. The attention displeased me, but i couldn't deny I was flattered.

I realized that on my record I killed on my own a dragon and a sphinx at seventeen. And with the international covering of the Triwizard I had caused, a lot of people also saw how I did it.

Thank Merlin the Daily Prophet didn't make it across the pond. I don't know how, but it leaked to the press that I had fought Voldemort to a standstill. It wasn't true, I just stayed alive long enough, whatever transpired, he held me at bay without really putting himself at risk, he was testing me more than anything else. On the paper, I was 19 years old and I taught at Hogwarts already.

Fleur had been very happy to be the one to bring 'such an excellent specimen' to France (Olympe words, not mine). She basically would have made me compete in that silly tournament nonetheless. I also discovered that a certain Colette had been offered a work with the aurors due to her show in the duels at Hogwarts, and that she often rubbed in Fleur's face that her 'adequate attempt' in the Triwizard didn't show the true might of France to the World. Leaving unsaid that she thought she could do better.

I was intrigued at the idea of seeing Fleur apply the knowledge she had assimilated from my book in her own style. It had been more than a year since our one and only lesson on the more profound aspects of magic.

It turns out the duels were complex things in France. There was a reporter who would comment the magics, as well as the tactics, he looked as stupid as Bagman. And there was a panel of three judges that would evaluate if the duel was 'fair'. Meaning no fyendfire or lethal force.

The people I faced were competent. Some fast and powerful, with even one of two I would have called brilliant.

But... I *had*, in fact, fought a seventy years old dark lord in a body he crafted himself for at least twenty minutes. Almost all of them lacked that... *push*. The one that makes you grit your teeth and think through pain and create something original and truly beautiful.

They were fast and their aim true, but what could they do when ice formed mirrors in front of each of their spells, their enchantments unraveled as soon as they were weaved, and their conjurations either vanished or attacked their own caster? What could they do when a single piece of paper in my hands became thousands of cutting leaves that resisted everything but the strongest fire?

Nothing that's the answer.

Until Delacroix. He could have been famous, I wouldn't have know, but I felt like I was duelling Hashirama from Naruto. There were fucking roots everywhere. Fire proved itself once more the best friend of a gardener. I gave tips here and there, it was probably a side effect from my year spent teaching.

The first fight of the day was the quarterfinals. In the afternoon it was scheduled the semifinal and the last match was to be held the day after. I was to face Fleur. I had occasion to observe a few of her fights, however, judging from the malicious glint in her eye, she probably kept her true tricks hidden to repair me from the dunking in the lake I gave her the last time we crossed wands. I'd say she's vindictive because she's french, or a veela, but probably it's just a woman thing. I didn't even try to understand it.

I was still annoyed that she forced me to leave the burrow I had dug in a bunch of woods in the outskirts of Paris. I was a fox for gods sake! I could open the trunk and entering it while being human once I was a few feet beneath the ground. The burrow was warded and had two entrances, like every fox wishes for his home. *'It's undignified'*

she said. Puah! She was jealous of my pretty and perfectly fine burrow, that's obviously it.

She opened the duel with fire. I wouldn't dismiss it however, to underestimate the opponent is to die.

I had been wise. The blue fireball followed me when I moved to the side, and dispersed against a stone column I raised from the ground only to take its form again immediately after and closing up on me. Fleur in the meantime hadn't been idle, and shot a preemptive shield breaker along with something that *is that a targeted transfiguration?*

I had left her the initiative, letting her dictate the pace of the fight. So I spun and twirled my wand, compressing-warding-releasing the space around me. The transfiguration was flung back, the shield breaker was one of the kind of spells that *cut*, and so it was unaffected. The blue fireball *exploded*. I was far enough that it didn't affect me, but it had been an unexpected result.

From her brief instant of *stillness*, it was a surprise for everyone.

"Beautifully conducted." I taunted her "Would the fire have interacted with the transfiguration?" I was honestly curious. Talking during a duel *was* bad form, it meant that you weren't really focusing on the fight. But it was true! She was fast on her feet and reasonably adaptable in her strategies. But something that comes with experience is *being effective*. Every spell you throw should have more than one purpose. That didn't mean that a spell should have more than a single effect, it was impossible. But when I threw an ice arrow, it was because it was set to pierce you, because it was laced with a lightning attracting charm that i could exploit and because it could become a cloud of vapour that would be the opening for my illusions.

She was 'witty', in her answers, meaning that she was sharp and used what was near me as a weapon. Commendable, really. I had her move in a circle along the arena, always forcing her to go right while being careful about hidden quicksand (thank you Voldemort).

While moving she weaved enchantments into the ground and the air itself, but they were... *quiescent?*

That was interesting! That was something she couldn't have done without having made hers the contents of my first book.

She jumped over the trap i was leading her into but was hit by my color changing charm.

The redhead *sarled*. I let out a chuckle, not really watching her. I was *listening* to what she had done to the arena, but while they were asleep, I couldn't really tell, they were only a promise of something. I raised an ice storm around me, with the shards and snow circulating clockwise and let the lightings run counterclockwise. I wanted to see how she would pass through that.

She tried again with fire but it was smothered by the cold before it could properly *breath*.

Then the *whatever* she had done to the arena awoke. I noticed her raising a stone wall with some effort between us, and more importantly, between her and the enchantment that had been slowly...*inhaling?* For more than a minute, and I felt almost lightheaded, like... *oxygen deprivation*.

I dropped my storm before compressing-warding-releasing in a controlled manner around my feet and flinging myself behind Fleur's wall, just in time before the enchantment ignited the fuckton of oxygen it had been storing in a blaze of blue hell. While Fleur was curious to see how his work would turn out, I didn't stop moving and disarmed her before pinning her against the stone wall. I was laughing. "Beautiful." I said, and we both knew to *what* I was referring to.

She was sweaty and panting, having just shown me an original application of warding that bypassed an alchemy process. Causing a badass **boom**.

So I returned my wand to her holster, grabbed her hips and kissed her, not slowly or hesitantly, like usual first attempts are. I was sure of what she and I both felt. And her lips were salty and smooth, like wind from the sea, and her hands that clutched my shoulders were decisive and wanting. "Grab your wand." I grumbled to her.

I *ran* to the reporter, who turned off the sonorus he had been using until that very moment. "I won, but today I won't be able to attend in the afternoon. Tomorrow I'll face the duellist that you have left, at the same time. So you can have your show. See ya!" Before the near judge panel could protest, the idiot reporter started exclaiming excited about the 'new exciting schedule'.

I reached Fleur who was still laughing at my actions. Then I performed the smoke transportation, bringing the both of us in the single room of the motel we were sharing. It had obviously been enlarged and was a more than comfortable apartment. She was a beautiful blue smoke, like the summer skies and her eyes.

1996-25 december Hogwarts Great Hall

A lot of people choose to stay at Hogwarts that year. With the war finally in the open, it was understandable, for the majority of the people at least. She however, how David swiftly noticed in her first year, was far from being part or even resembling the majority. And this year, like many others, he remembered it far too late for his tastes.

Professor Flitwick hopped on the seat next to Luna, and gently asked: "Hello, miss. Lovegood, this is your first Christmas here, and forgive me if I am indelicate, but has something happened to your home?"

Luna slowly blinked in his direction. She always liked to take a second or two before talking with anyone, to make sure the nargles wouldn't be interrupting the conversation, or making the other so confused that she wouldn't be able to be understood. It would simply

be silly to start a conversation in that case. But then most people just went away before she could answer, and that clearly meant that they weren't really ready to listen, so it was better that they walked away. Even if it saddened her a little every time it happened. And when she found someone who stopped his own clock from going forward so that they could have a nice conversation, like it was properly done, she was already a bit happy.

It was rare that someone understood that if you wanted to bring words into the world, you had to be careful to not spook them, and so it was proper gifting them, after an introduction, only to those who stopped their own time from running away with them, leaving space for both the silence that came before, and the one it would come later.

It was one of the reasons that made her like riddles, after all riddles were introduction to a single word. Given in rhymes, so that you could show the care you would be offering to the answer of the riddle.

But Luna knew it wasn't really their fault, after all they always cut their years in days, their days in hours, their hours in minutes, and even their minutes in seconds. They were mostly being silly, in her wary opinion, how could there be time for them too, if seconds already filled everything?

When they called her names it hurt a bit too. But they still were only being silly, after all they didn't really have time to understand. She smiled a bit at that absurdity. Like you could own time. Time it was like a breath. Decided Luna. You could take it, but not keep it. Maybe she should make it a riddle for Raven, she was nice, she always had time for both silence and words. Like David. David was nice too. And she remembered when he found a way to show to those that were being silly that there were a lot of reasons to be sure of what they were listening to, and to be kind with the words they introduced to the world. Ginevra had been nice too once, but that had been a long time ago, and she did no longer wait before and after the words.

Professor Flitwick hadn't always remembered to be kind with the words he brought into the air. But for the most part he was being silly so the others that were being silly could understand what he was telling them. He often remembered the patience of the stone, and the hopping of a candle. It must be difficult, reflected Luna, being a candle when you were born a stone. But suddenly, the nargles looked like they didn't want to jumble him, and he also had remembered to let his words settle, before pouring others on top of them.

But he was also ravenclaw, so she was ready for his riddle. He didn't really want to know if something happened at her home, after all, a lot of things always happened everywhere.

"Daddy had been invited to an expedition in the forest of Canada, they thought that since there it's very cold, almost like Norway, maybe a Snorkack got lost there and they needed an expert."

He had been almost worried at her vacant expression, but he remembered trying to skim her thought once before, just to witness how *beautiful* the world she saw could be. And he remembered almost crying at having a whole world in your heart that you couldn't describe with words.

"That must be a very lucky opportunity, I hope he manages to find something extraordinary." replied Flitwick, being almost saddened when he noticed that he somehow didn't use the right words to express that if she wanted to talk, he was available. He tried to communicate with her several times during the years, but she seemed to get lost in her own mind at times, or speak in circles that even he, with his considerable ability with words and attitudes, couldn't hope to follow. He had been happy to see David, another of his introverted ravens, being so protective of her and managing to talk in the riddles she seemed to enjoy that much. It had been a relief even during the last year, having him there as a fellow professor. They remained friends, how silly of him to have doubted either of them. However she was obviously saddened by the absence of her friend, and while he couldn't resent him his dream to see the world,

he had hoped that he could have stayed around. For her sake if not for his.

He was startled when she heard her say: "He's not really away." she was stroking absent mindedly a bracelet. With a glowing ember that seemed to burn brighter when miss. Lovegood caressed it.

There were several students that stayed at Hogwarts during those winter holidays. However the headmaster insisted to have everyone seat at the same table. It was then that an albatros of all things flew in bringing what looked like a package wrapped in Christmas colours. A last minute present maybe? Then it landed and Filius laughed delighted, along with Minerva and Babbling.

The bird was entirely made of little pyramids of paper, that collapsed one upon the other until the albatros was a little chick that stumbled its way into the table to the outstretched palms of a smiling miss. Lovegood.

It chirped.

"I come hidden,

In all forms and more,

often sudden,

and hard to ignore.

I'm glad to be divested,

I hope I'm not making you distressed,

I'm a falling star,

and the blown birthday candle,

I can be a car,

and even a shiny new door handle.

What am I?"

Miss. Lovegood squealed: "A present!"

The chick exploded in a twister of coloured papers that became leaves, they kept moving like a flock around the great Hall, following a music nobody could hear.

Miss. Lovegood opened the package only to find several others wrapped together within.

With the great surprise and trepidation of everyone, she passed the little presents to their rightful owners.

Filius noticed that David had probably gone all out, crafting new spells only for the occasion. But he always had a knack for those.

Minerva opened the little wooden box looking inside before reading the note. But after her sneaked glance, she changed her mind.

Dear Minerva,

When everything looks lost,

put Gungnir

in the hands of a stone soldier.

Careful, it will work only once.

Merry Christmas,

My friend, my teacher, my family

Minerva slowly extracted a spear from a little wooden box that shouldn't be able to contain it. It was two meters long, it had a stone bottom, a long wooden body covered in runes so entwined that couldn't be distinguished from random scratches. The top of the spear was in a very deadly looking black steel, with an Ansuz rune that pulsed steadily, like a beating heart, in white.

Filius took his clue and read the note before opening his present.

Dear Filius

Make sure to throw

Pandora's box very far from your allies

and very close to your enemies.

Like for Pandora,

Elpis should stay with you

Merry Christmas,

My friend, my teacher, my family

Unwrapping the paper slowly, he noticed a vial with a memory, along with a note. *'Instructions for the safe use. The less criptic version'* Filius laughed.

Dumbledore recieved a note, that he read slowly and that disappeared in a flash of fire immediately after. The old headmaster stroked his beard, thinking so hard it would have killed a lesser man.

He wanted to be seven,

but the eighth he made unwillingly,

destroyed his first.

I burned the raven in the castle

and stabbed a ring.

The badger sleeps under goblin wards

the strange had always found a way.

The snake in the cave was stolen

It's in the hands of the wretched slave of the one that sent Snape to be eaten by Lupin.

His familiar is the last.

Luna took her present eagerly, and choosing to keep safe the words inside the note, she didn't read it. She should wait until there was the appropriated silence for those, and the laughing around, while not saddening, was not appropriate.

She opened a small, velvet box.

White light exploded from it like a wave. And everyone could recognise the feeling brought forward by a patronus. It slowly receded, going back into the little box. It contained a little butterfly hairclip. The insect was smaller than her palm, and its wings looked like light and a laugh, and a day with the exact number of clouds. She let a little tear run away from her left eye. Because the wings of the butterfly were also like a hug she remembered receiving in June, when he said goodbye.

13. chapter 13: A stroll before breakfast

1997-23 january

The air was refreshing without being cool, and, along with the distinct *feel* of the snow, made me want to *try* and summon a proper storm. With avalanches and winds so strong they would form twisters capable of kidnapping into the clouds the fools who dared to defy the weather.

I shook my head, I knew very well it wasn't something I could do. *Yet.*

I knew that I shouldn't walk around with only my trousers and my wand. It wasn't really a proper way of being discrete, but I was in the middle of the Alps, so I was hardly parading my magic in Picadilly. It was unlikely that a group of muggles would actually jump out of nowhere, see me and scream 'wizard' making me responsible break the Statute. And I was able to perform memory charms anyway.

I snorted, Fleur would pout me for having left the shack without waking her, even if I left a note.

I smiled, picturing her face in my mind. I felt... *happy?* I didn't expect to become so attached to her so soon, even if I hoped in something like this to happen at some point in our relationship. But in the short year we've been separated, she *became* who I *felt* she had the potential to be. While she maintained the vanity and pride a veela typically develops, those traits were now more due to her knowledge of herself, and the understanding of what she would one day be able to do. She always had wanted to be treated like a queen, even if she didn't know it, and she was growing into it.

I had anticipated that a large part of the snags we would encounter during our relationship, at least for the first year, would all be linked to my refusal to formally teach her. But I had to explain it only once.

"Magic is half about understanding of the world outside us, and half understanding the one inside us." I told her.

While it did admittedly sound like a very jedi thing to say, it was true. Being spoonfed knowledge in a class would help someone with getting started on the path of magic, and would be more than enough for anyone that was content with what he was showed. Fleur and I both wanted to be *more*. To be among the greatest not only of our time, but among the wizards and witches of *all* the times. Not for the recognition, no. That would be a very hollow thing on which base our future. The 'being recognized as the greatest' part would come as a side effect of *being* and *having done* the greatest things in all of History.

"I could teach you." I had told her "I could teach you how I view magic, and the world. And I could correct the flaws I would see in your approach, showing you my solution to your difficulties, giving you a ladder or an alternate path everytime you find yourself facing a wall. And you would never be able to perform any of my best trick as well as me, even with ten years of practice. How someone interacts with magic is a very personal thing. I could never come up with an enchantment that bypasses an alchemical process because I know actual alchemy. If I were formally teaching you, like you are asking me to, I would have stopped you from working on what I would have seen as a fruitless attempt and taught you how I would do it. And would have failed in producing something as beautiful and so... so... *you*."

I remember kissing away her frown then, because she never thought about it in that way. "Explore your limits, break them, rise above. Like you did until the duelling tournament. You will find that learning magic is a cross between learning how to play music and climbing a mountain. Like for music, learning magic is a process that only ends when you stop thinking about it, and there are more than a single path to the top."

I hated drinking wine, it always hit me without warning. So I had been a little bit drunk while giving that speech, but I got the message

across, more her merit than mine, no doubt. I wouldn't teach her, but I would talk about magic with an equal. Giving tips that helped me in exchange of other tips. I didn't want a subordinate, not someone who could keep up with me, but someone who could carve his (or her) own path.

I laughed at the memory, and raised my wand once more, like I did thousands of times, simply letting myself to *be*, taking in the feeling of the resin clotting the wound in the bark where a branch had been snapped off, the creeping cold of the snow around my feet, the whispering of the wind among the trees.

I slowly collected myself, warming the air around me with a twirl of my wand. Feeling immortal was a stupid reason for walking around half naked. Stupid Philosopher's Stone. I was feeling the aftereffects of the elixir far too much for my liking. Maybe it was only because I wasn't used to it, time would tell.

I had been greatly disappointed by the peak of alchemic research everyone always coveted and dreamed of. It was a trick, since it wasn't really a stone. It was more like an extremely viscous liquid, like glass. And behaved much more like a plant than anything else. Those were things anyone could learn with enough time spent observing the Stone, an alchemist would laugh at those observations. The most terrifying thing an alchemist could do was converting kinetic energy into heat and heat in kinetic energy redirecting small portions of it into transmutations. The stone, much like my fyendfire-metal hybrid, was an always active alchemical process. That is to say, that the stone was *always* at a temperature of 300,15 Kelvin (27 C). And, like all physical bodies, when it was in an environment at a higher temperature (or otherwise in contact with something 'warmer'), was on the receiving end of a flow of thermal energy. Thermal energy is Heat (that can become Kinetic Energy in the hands of an alchemist). So, while in a warmer environment, the Stone stored energy. But when in a colder environment (or in contact with something that was at a lower temperature than 27C), the Stone

kept its temperature, meaning it did not surrender energy to said colder element.

In short, the Stone was *always* storing heat.

Now, the Stone was also something that *did not bounce*. Why? Because it stored Kinetic energy also.

The true marvel of it, was that the Stone kept storing again and again. Every time it touched something warmer, every time it recieved a flick. It was a never full battery. It did not explode because while stored into the Stone, all that energy did not actually exist, but was in there in a tight, endless cycle of kinetic-heat-kinetic-heat. And the only way through which it could release said energy, was through spending small portions of it in a transmutation. Crafting the Stone had meant *binding* the will that directed the cyclic transformation of kinetic into thermal energy to something. Said something was a lump of crystallized blood. My blood, since it was always been subjected to my soul-voice and identity, and so it reacted better to my magic than anything else. I didn't actually know if Flamel's one had been the same as mine, probably not, since the way you understand reality and manipulate it becomes more personal with the most complex kind of magic.

So, lead to gold? Doable, and it was as easy as transfiguring it, because you could pour so much *energy* into the transmutation, that the soul of the lead would convince itself that it *was* gold, and always had been. How? Energy is mass, with the infamous $E=mc^2$ so you could pour so much energy in the transmutation that you would *change* the mass of the lead. That equation worked, however magic was not strictly bound to physics, and so I didn't really need that kind of energy. Elements are based roughly on electrons, protons, and neutrons. Transmuting through the Stone, meant you *actually* created *mass*, adding to a said bunch of atoms (of the same element) neutrons, electrons and protons, turning it into another element. There were, like always, limitations and dangers:

1)the energy stored into the Stone could be unleashed in a transmutation. But only *slowly*. So an alchemist couldn't snap his fingers and turn a sea into a cloud of steam.

2)transmuting something into any of the noble elements (Argon, Gold...) was *expensive*, in the time that it was needed to complete the process and in the energy that was necessary to *start* said process both.

3)complexity matters: transmuting worked from an element to another, transmuting *wine*, while possible, at least in theory, was so horribly complex in practice that it was impossible. Wine is not only fancy water. There is hydrogen, oxygen, carbon. Organized in molecules, and complex ones: $C_4H_6O_6$, $HOOCCH(OH)CH_2COOH$, only to name two. And transmuting a molecule, even H_2O , meant that you had to direct the alchemical process into crafting atomic bonds that very much preferred to stay on their own as elements, at least during the transmutation. You could transmute oxygen and hydrogen in the correct proportions and the right conditions of temperature and pressure both, and they would condense into water. Directly transmuting a molecule was a process you should lead with your *soul-voice* (that is your magic), that cannot be so precise in its requests to any part of the world-soul.

4) the elixir of life was a liquid form of the Stone. People age because their cells split and after they hit 25 they start losing more and more of their cells telomeres. At some point the telomere at the end of your DNA finishes, and during mitosis you start losing the end strands of your DNA. The elixir made sure that it did not happen, and had the side effect that your metabolism ran at double speed. So, stopped aging and made you need more than a double dose of the food. The elixir was not a potion, but an inert alchemical process that would start in each of your cells once its microscopical parts reached it during their mitosis. Being based on your blood and soul-imprint on it, it wouldn't work for anyone else. It would, in fact, kill them. And too much of it would turn me into a big amount of stem

cells before exploding. The Stone could store endless amounts of energy, your body could not.

5) the elixir also made you feel like you could do *everything*, so it made easy overextending yourself and making errors that could easily kill you.

That was the gist of it. I shook my head, clearing my thoughts and turning my back on the valley covered in snow before going back to the shack.

While I had chosen the location of Rabbit's Hole so it could place me somewhere I had easy access to open fields and sea both, I left the choice of how and where build her home to Fleur. I called mine Rabbit's Hole because I was a fox animagus and found it hilarious, and also because I could dig inside the British coast virtually forever, crafting my very own Wonderland. Also, the fact that I was the one to create it from nothing, the expansion charms I could add to it or parts of it would last virtually until the UK sank into the sea. Making my first room and the 'inside fields, had been fun, and while tricky at the beginning, it hadn't been strenuous. So I kept thinking about ways in which I could improve it. While it would never become a system of caves in which a dragon could fly, my future basilisk would end up with hunting fields and more space it would know what to do with.

Fleur, thinking about herself, chose to call hers Nest. Because veelas were somewhat half bird, duh. When I asked her how was it like, she pointedly observed that it would be like asking me what was it like to be human.

During one of our mock duels however, she got desperate enough that she had been able to 'bring out' her heritage. Her cheekbones went up while her chin and nose merged into a cruel beak, with her beautiful blue eyes swallowed by her pupils. She sprouted beautiful white wings, while feathers covered what I could see of her skin. Her feet turned into fearsome talons that ripped her shoes apart, and her nails became black claws. She had been still able to hold her wand, using it with less finesse, but she was faster, able to fly, very

much less predictable, and able to throw at me little fireballs that burned blue with her other hand. She wasn't suddenly able to beat me, even if I had to be a tad bit more careful to not hurt her. I smiled again at the memory, when she returned to her senses, she had been so embarrassed of her appearances, that I actually had found exotic, but no less beautiful. She also had been ashamed of her loss of control, and I agreed with her there. But as I understood it, she was very young and very powerful among her kind, making her other form something not easy to conquer.

So, she choose to call it a Nest, but refused to live in a treehouse, and in a 'cave with make up' too (that was what she liked to call Rabbit's Hole). However, she expressed her wish to stay somewhere *High*. And since we were crossing the Alps at the time, she saw no reason to wait for another country to settle her private refuge in. In France her family home would always be open for her after all. *Impatient one* I thought.

I turned into my fox form and ran fast through the undergrowth, my padded feet allowing me to move without having to force my way through the foot high snow. I followed my tracks backwards until I reached the clearing in which we had hastily built a shack. We were living in my trunk inside of it until the tower we were building was complete. Yes, a tower almost on the top of a mountain crest. And she refused the Dol Gundur design I jokingly proposed. I helped her polish her original idea instead, and shamelessly stole from Renzo Piano' Shard, that would be built only in 2012. We had completed the base with only a week of work, shaping the rock of the mountain. Steel was a difficult thing to procure and beyond my ability to transmute. Crystal was way easier to craft, and held the great advantage over glass that it could be enchanted. Charmed iron worked just as well as steel, so no problems on that front.

For now, the tower started with black rock shaped like a twisting flame around the bottom of the structure, after seven meters the giant iron bars shot upward until they met at the top terrace, 313 meters higher. The walls were entirely made of enchanted crystal,

with balconies opening here and there. There were really more space that we knew what to do with, and that was without expansion charms. As soon as the enchantments were complete, we would tear down the shack to begin living into the Nest, and start rummaging through the endless amounts of Lost Things I had stored in my trunk from the Room of Requirement. It would do until Fleur managed to acquire proper furnishing.

We started it in november, and it was almost done. It was beautiful, and I placed crystal flowers of different kinds all over it. They were little and discrete, and were the focus of an active alchemical process that turned the kinetic energy discharged upon them by the wind into heat that kept the inside around 20 Celsius degrees. I wouldn't have been able to craft those three months ago, they were another strange application of the same process I used with my Fyendfire-metal hybrid for book bindings. And their project had been the kick that pushed me into the right direction to craft my philosopher stone.

I entered my trunk after closing the shack's door. The first floor had been turned into a vegetable garden, so that setting up greenhouses in the Nest would be faster and smoother, I didn't particularly like it, but I endured.

Raven flew toward me from one of the trees I managed to grow in the enlarged space. Hopping onto my shoulder she croaked into my ear.

"I'm the sailor's friend,

and cruel shot caller.

For the moon's wims I bend,

I creep lower and rise taller.

Who am I?"

I acutally had come to like riddles, never seen that coming. "The tide?" I answered.

She flapped her wings, hopping from my shoulder to my outstretched arm. She stared at me with her normal eye. It still wasn't clear if she could see through her silver one. Even if she could get glimpses of the future, so it had been a far more than fair trade.

"

I passed the library floor without stopping to check on the new books I had been collecting since France. Runes artworks from all over Germany, potion procedures from Vienna (Fleur had a minor talent for potions, and was interested in bettering her understanding of them), and finally Mastering the Sky, from Poland. When we could afford the books, we bought them, I stole them otherwise, and that had been the case with the last tome. I had never been more glad Grindelwald went on a campaign, stealing rare artifacts and knowledge from all over europe only to stack them here and there. In Poland they raised a museum upon one of those treasure boxes, exhibiting Mastering the Sky. I simply hadn't been able to resist.

I kept going downstairs. Refusing to fall to the lure of new knowledge. I ended up in my 'apartment floor' noticing tummy busy with the kitchen, probably setting up a far too big breakfast. I had paved this floor with solid panels of maple, adding only a single white-fur carpet upon which rested a brazier. There was also a modest round table with a stool and a chair that completed the living room, with the kitchen covering one of the walls, and the others, I hadn't been able to resist, were covered by white boards upon wich I could scribble every kind of thought that crossed my mind. There was still a section that showed my first project for a boat that could sail the seas, fly, and dive underwater. I had hit an unbreakable wall at the time, but with the new understanding of alchemy that I reached while helping Fleur with her tower could probably open a new road to my end goal. I shook my head, focusing once again on my task. I opened the sliding door toward the bedroom expecting to find her awake and annoyed by my absence when she woke up (I

smiled at the thought, she was always so inexplicably offended by that) but while she was awake, the fire of her magic that I could *listen* was subdued and almost quiescent. Then I noticed what she was reading.

"Those are some very old notes of mine." I grumbled as 'hello'.

She tore her gaze from the page and turned those vast blue eyes on me. I didn't even try to pretend I had not been admiring her chest. She expected to be admired by everyone, but *liked* when it was *me*. Having said that, I refused to turn into a bumbling fool mostly to spite her and to keep proving myself that I could. She smirked, noticing my internal struggle, and put down my notes, knowingly exposing herself even more.

"You could already have crafted yourself a new eye." she accused me.

I sighed, I didn't expect *that*. "Like I said, those are very old notes." I grinned at her frown, she was confused, since what she said was true. I didn't own her an explanation, but there where things we could discuss once she knew the real story.

"What do you know about Raven?" I asked her.

Her frown deepened, the apparently non sequitur question had her linking the absence of my eye with my familiar, and she couldn't make head or tails of that connection. Not that I expected anyone but me could.

"Female raven with white feathers, a silver eye." she started recapping, hoping to stumble upon a pattern, no doubt. "She understands several languages, and manages to get her meaning across using single words. She plays riddles, and sometimes puts into them things she shouldn't be able to know, perhaps she has a minor talent for divination. Which is a extraordinary feat for anyone but a demiguise, which she is not." Fleur concluded.

I nodded, it was indeed a good summary of my familiar. "Ollivander once told me, referring to wandlore, that 'feelings are everything'." I recalled out loud.

"I was trying to hatch a raven capable of not only speak more than one language, but able to understand and crypt messages on it's own. So that she could act as a safe messenger. I conducted my experiment putting an egg into a modified pensieve, in which I poured several potions to enable someone to speak another language, along with my memories, so that the raven could somewhat have things to make references to when crypting messages." I started explaining. "I had calculated every step of that experiment, the arithmancy of it had not been a joke, let me tell you. It was then that I got a *feeling* that adding this and that would be exactly the *perfect* thing to do. In the same way I know that I don't have the right wood to craft a wand with basilisk venom as its core, or that one of your hair would sing most wonderfully with that extraordinary branch of fir I stumbled upon weeks ago." I stopped, studying her reaction. She looked irked that I only said *this and that* in my explanation, instead of properly explain what happened.

"I acted on those feelings, adding, amor other things, my blood to the mixture. And she hatched from her egg." I went on "Very much like you see her now, playful and mischievous, with a pechant for riddles and stealing shining little things. But ultimately stupid, I had to teach her words in english, which she was misteriously unable to translate, and I had to train her to not steal the stuff I needed." I let my face turn into a frown, that bird had been a pest for months. Fleur looked way more alert now, mentioning my blood had picked her interest. And since she knew a few snippets about blood and sacrifice, she could see where I was going with my tale. It was time to annoy her with another apparent non sequitur.

"According to both The Prose Edda and The Poetic Edda, Odin in his search for wisdom put on his traveller's guise and went to the land of the giants in search of Mimir's well. The Well of Mimir was located in Jotunheim, the land of the Frost Giants, and fed Yggdrasil,

the world tree that held the 9 realms in balance. Mimir the Wise One was the guardian of memories who protected the well of cosmic knowledge. Biologically, Mimir was an uncle to Odin, through his giantess mother Bestla. Despite their family bond, Mimir refused to allow Odin to drink from the well without any payment. Thus, Odin gouged out his right eye and placed it into the well. After he had done this, Mimir filled Gjallerhorn, the horn with which he drank from the well, and allowed Odin to drink. After he had drunk, Odin was able to foresee his fate." I narrated, remembering the Norse mythology I liked so much in my first life. Some of the stories also said that Odin beheaded Mimir and used his head to divinate the future, but it wasn't important to the purpose of my tale. Fleu was actually scowling, and crossed her arms in annoyance. I so loved to mess with her.

"Imagine my surprise when one day Raven hops near me, to apparently read what I was writing, and eats my left eye." I raised a hand, forestalling her questions. "After gobbling it down, she said 'Sorry'. A word that I never thought her, and I asked her why she ate my eye in Japanese. Since she learned sorry on her own, maybe the potions had started working, honestly I had no idea. She said, and I quote: 'Blood not enough, eye is enough'. Since then, she became, not less playful or mischievous, but... more adult, I guess? Somehow *smarter*, like she actually understood the contest we were in. For example, she lowered her stealing my trinkets a great deal. And she brought me an olive branch that was perfect for a unicorn hair I had. I crafted my first one with that. A few months later, she made up a riddle during the Weighting of the Wands, about stuff that she couldn't possibly know, and she had been the one to push me to enter the Triwizard." I studied Fleur's face then, she looked skeptical.

"You are saying that she can prophesize because she ate your eye? In the same way Odin could once he sacrificed his own in the stories?" She asked me. It was clear that she wasn't convinced.

"In my experience, magic and coincidences don't mesh well together." I started. "And stories come from somewhere. You once

accused me of signing myself as One-Eye with the Odin's rune Ansuz. The parallelisms are too many and happened independently one from the other. Odin could see the future and had Huginn and Muninn, that were in a sense, a part of him. Raven can see snippets of the future, and is, as my familiar, a part of me. He was called Glad of War, and while battling the Sphinx and Voldemort both, I felt myself uncharacteristically enjoying it. At some point I will be able to live only of my elixir, without need for food, and the Allfather only drank wine. That it's not to say I'm turning into a god or anything so stupid. But it's believable that if such a powerful mage lived and has been thought to be a god, a memory of his soul has been imprinted into the world-soul. The more similar I grow to him, the more my soul resonates with the memory of his. And it would explain why Norse Runes work so well for me. And why Ansuz acted like a blessing on my iron golem against Lord Voldemort."

She frowned, the few things she knew about souls were too vague to properly discuss this. That's when I handed over a tome with a basilisk skin hardcover, very telling Fyendfire-metal bindings, and an Ansuz rune carved on the front.

"This is the second book of the series I'm writing. *The Whole*: it explores the meaning of rituals and blood magic, the how and why behind them, and as such, the nature of animism, with some interesting hypothesis regarding true immortality, and not the temporary solution I achieved through the Stone. I'd like to hear your opinion about this and my eye both." I told her.

Her eyes shone when she had it in her hands, and I knew she would soon bring forward ideas and observations that would force me to reevaluate my understanding of what was happening to me once again.

"And you could start thinking about your path to immortality." I added, before kissing her and going back to the kitchen.

14. chapter 14: Worldbuilding

1997-03 may

I was happy of the results. The newly hatched Chinese Fireball was responsive to english. That trick with the potion to learn new languages and a microscopic hole in the shell of its egg worked well.

I twirled the red plume I harvested from the basilisk I bred and killed a few weeks before, focusing once again on the newborn dragon. It was of a beautiful red, and was having fun exploring the cave beneath the tower.

With another brilliant applications of runes, and my now deep understanding of souls, I bound its identity to the one of the tower. Fleur had been nervous about my idea of adding a dragon to Dawnshard, but once we went over the rituals I had been planning to use she was quickly on board. Ans she shared her experience with enthralling dragons to the project. The dragon would never be able to talk, but it could understand, and while it was not strong enough to stand up to the will of a powerful mage yet, it would always obey to Fleur. Since she was the one who held the ward's reins. I threw at the little dragon a sleeping charm and went outside, looking for Fleur. I had another surprise for her.

A few minutes later I found myself rolling on my left shoulder, neatly avoiding whatever the purple light Fleur threw at me was. I would ask, *later*.

At the moment I was busy dealing with a veela that managed to swiftly direct her avian form, without losing her higher mental faculties. While her control of her most complex spells and enchantments turned wobbly, the sheer power behind everything fire related was awe inspiring, even if it lacked finesse.

I directed my signature storm of ice and lightning in a way that would encompass and smother the vast wave of blue fire coming toward me. I had to abandon that effort in order to dodge a clawed foot that would have left me a macho looking scar if not for my loyal and battered dragonhide vest. It wasn't the one I would have used for a real battle, but in this way she could get some experience in using all of her features in a fight.

Fleur was always competitive, but when she let her heritage show she turned almost predatory.

She didn't let me regain my balance and was immediately on me, her wand arm redirecting the blue fire and the other hand slashing upwards, forcing me to bend backward. I used the movement to kick her in the gut, pushing us apart and giving myself some space. Most of the magic I used in a fight was a little on the lethal side, so I was somewhat at a disadvantage. That was the perfect occasion however, to break in one of my greatest accomplishment so far.

I grinned when she came rushing at me once again. I raised my wand pointing it to the sky, *reaching* for it. I knew that incantations were bullshit, but the more complex the magic, the more giving it a name helped you associate its workings with your intent. With elemental magic was actually something that worked against you, since giving a name to the act of shaping water, for example, would only restrict your intent. What I was trying to perform however, was as far from elemental magic as a neutron star was from a bonfire.

I called: "Atlas!" and my muscles tensed, while the weight of the sky came crashing down in a seven feet radius around me. I gritted my teeth, enduring the not-endurable weight. Fleur ended up eating the dirt, pressed against the ground, unable to lift even one feather of her beautiful wings. While holding the sky's weight, I took a slow step toward her, then another. By the time I reached Fleur, the transformation had receded, and I was able to slowly pick up her wand from her struggling hand, before taking a step back, and letting go of the weight of the sky.

My spine popped and my knees screamed murder. Without the elixir circling in my bloodstream that effort would have knocked me out for at least a week. It would never get easy, but I could get used to it enough to exploit far better. It had potential.

I helped Fleur on her bare feet, before handing over her wand.

"What was that?" she asked me, panting because of the stress my spell put on her body. I was having a hard time regulating my breath too, but I performed it several times to work out the various kinks of it, so I was used to the strain, and my enhanced metabolism helped process the fatigue.

"That was Atlas. The first of the Titan's Sequence." I told her. I was proud. And I had the right to be! Atlas was not some kind of gravity manipulating charm, since manipulating gravity directly was a recipe for disaster, but the most complex air shaping spell I've ever heard about. I created it after having processed the contents of Mastering the Sky, and meshing them with my memories of the physics of the pressure exerted by a column of air. Torricelli had been a genius. "I'll let you know when I ultimate the Chronos Project." I added. I may have been a tad bit smug, but Atlas deserved all the admiration everyone was capable of. My smugness was simply... respecting... yes, respecting my spell.

Since we started travelling together, she learned how to conceal her speechlessness, but I could tell that she was a tad bit envious of my latest breakthrough.

"Is that the reason you insisted we practiced outside today?" she asked me while walking back to Dawnshard. The pretentious name Fleur chose for the tower we built was appropriate, the way which our refuge among the Alps shined truly made it look like the first ray of sunlight encased in diamond. It did help that the fyendfire-metal black plaques were disguised, so that the enchanted crystal could be shown in all of its glory. That didn't mean I had to like the name, too much high bourgeois, or even aristocrat. Not really my style, but it had Fleur signed all over it.

"Well, I also didn't want to ruin the first floor, and we would have spooked the deers. But maybe... yes, Atlas won't work underground, and it would probably be nullified by the kinetic energy redirection process of the tower." I answered, before going on with the interesting things I noticed during our spar.

"Your blue flame is coming together quite smoothly, you don't seem to need to focus on it so much anymore. Learning Fyendfire and mastering Gibraithian Fire will probably give you another angle from which you can approach it. What was that purple thing?"

And so we went on, discussing the finer points of our magic and the best parts of our duel. We reached the high stone doors that gave access to the Tower, waiting for a couple of seconds so they had the time to open, turning outwards silently on their foundations. On my insistence, we designed the doors so they could resist to battering rams or even giants swinging their clubs at it. There was no reason for not making sure the beautiful tower would also be unassaultable.

I took a moment to look at the snow that melted on the surface of the imposing Dawnshard. I knew the liquid was being collected beneath the tower to be used to water the fields and greenhouses inside. And the pool floor wouldn't be filling itself otherwise. I recognized the balcony of said floor, from which a waterfall came crashing down, only to turn into mist after the 150meters of free fall. Mist that was redirected around Dawnshard and became part of the concealing enchantments.

"I think Luna would like it very much. Filius and Minerva too." I told Fleur conversationally while we were walking over the gravel pathway that crossed the grass field that covered the entirety of the first floor. Cherry trees in bloom stood at the sides of the path, and dozen of deers could be seen in the distance. It was one of my endless loops, running into the same direction would make you return at the starting point after 21 kilometers. The ceiling was 17 meters higher and obviously enchanted to show us the sky. Say what you want, but Hogwarts had the coolest things. Until I and Fleur came around, that is.

"Gabby would love this. My parents too." answered her, she was smiling faintly, perhaps picturing her sister face.

I grimaced a bit, causing her to laugh. "You know that you will have to properly talk with my parents again sometimes, don't you?"

"I already did, thank you very much." I snapped back, causing her to laugh even louder.

We reached the Stairway to Heaven, which was a spectacular giant open double-spiral staircase in what looked like white marble. It ran for the entire length of the tower, ending up on the roof terrace, where I suggested Fleur to place her Perfect Gibrathian Fire once she mastered it. The two spirals ascend the first three floors without ever meeting, illuminated from above by a sort of lumos without a well defined point of origin. That had been one of Fleur's original works. She took the runic plaque Babbling gifted me for Christmas what seemed to be a lifetime before, and tweaked it, before applying it over *all* the staircases, and there were 81 of them. And obviously the single steps were smartly enchanted, like hell I was ever going to use a staircase more than 300 meters high. There were localized expansion charms on the height of each step that worked only when you started walking on the following step. Fleur applied those, it was a very well tried procedure that I never heard about, but I couldn't deny it worked like a charm. The upper floors were a mind shattering maze for anyone but Fleur and I, and that was without the confounding enchantments that would assault everyone that didn't have Fleur's permission to be in the tower.

I helped her a lot with that work, however, she was the Lady of Dawnshard, and the tower answered first to her, then to me. Even if the underground system of caves was of my creation, and the 79 iron golems I stacked in should have preferred me to Fleur. Giving names to places was a curious thing, while it was a necessary component of the whole 'I ward what I own, and I own what I give a name to', when applied to a place with such a high concentration of magic, around that name and place an *identity* started to coalesce. That's not to say that the tower was sentient, no, but in 300 hundred

years it would probably develop its quirks. Very much like Hogwarts, in fact. That's to say that the act of *naming* something was important, and while I jokingly called the system of caves Root, it was still a part of Dawnshard, and the shifting wards we put even down there would choose Fleur over me. Choose means that if we ever were to enter in a true conflict, the wards would see me as 'intruder' and her as 'rightful owner'. In the same way Hogwarts recognised Voldemort as the 'true professor' of DADA.

"They had just seen you kidnapping me to have your way with me, it's understandable if there has been some misunderstanding." she teased me, again. I was never going to live it down. Perhaps it was time to go tinker with the basilisk ritual. "It's Luna's OWL year." I said instead, choosing to abandon the embarrassing topic. "With the war and her father outside of the country already, maybe I can persuade Xenophilus and Luna to go around without her NEWTs, that she could sit independently." I ventured.

"We could spend all together the summer here, before we start again traveling, I miss my family, and you miss Filius and Minerva too, not only that girl. And frankly I want us to show off Dawnshard to our families." Fleur offered.

"Sounds good to me." I answered, swiftly ignoring that she placed Filius as my father and Minerva as my mother. "I don't think Minerva will have much time, but she should be able to take a couple of weeks off work. I'll write to them in the protean charmed journal we share, and set up a couple of origami albatros, one for Luna and one so you can reach your family. Ask them to find you a couple of house elves for you to breed here, if we plan to leave Dawnshard for some time, I can't leave Tummy here on his own, since the tower recognises you as the rightful owner." I sighed, when Raven found her way onto my shoulder, she probably had an answer to the last riddle I gave her, and it was her turn to ask one. However, she controlled herself and didn't interrupt me, gracefully allowing me to finish my speech.

"Probably I should go back to Rabbit's Hole for at least a couple of weeks, to restock what we hadn't been able to grow here yet, finish making copies of the books I own for Dawnshard's library, make sure Winky and Tummy won't have problems into getting together, and getting Wonderland started. At least the self sustaining underground forest." I added. She looked at me, going over what I told her. A brief frown crossed her features at the thought of being separated, but it melted into a smile. She turned her nose up, assuming an imperative tone: "Take two months, when you're back I'll have mastered Gibraithian Fire."

I would have laughed at her boasting, if I didn't know of her quite scary affinity for everithing fire-related. I doubted she could master it, but casting a rough approximation of it? It was well in the realm of possibilities.

"And the Chinese Fireball hatched, she's asleep and waiting for you to name her." I answered, changing topic.

I sighed. I probably had to modify the Root so a grown dragon would be able to fly in it, even with a loop expansion charm, it would be a nightmare.

1997-15 june

The forests grew fast. No, That was not entirely correct, since I took the Time Room and applied it to the much larger system of underground caves. It took me a month and half of pure digging, and three whole days to enlarge what I obtained, before linking it to the *mass* that stretched the whole Wonderland so that the time would flow so much faster that it would have looked like the world outside creeped to a standstill. It was a gradual process: the deeper into Wonderland you were, the faster the time flew, that allowed me to make it always accessible. I could enter or exit my Time Room once at the end of each hour (of normal time flow). Here, on the upper levels the difference was barely noticeable, but were I was walking a whole week was barely a second of normal time outside.

Rabbit's Hole was so structured: after my loft, there was the fields room, in which I placed a staircase that went spiralling down, ending up in a clearing on the top of what looked like a mountain, 15 meters below. I placed there the great stone basin in which danced my Gibrathian Fire.

The time in that point barely added a minute for every hour of normal time flow, and because of that, it was only a grass field, with few trees i transplanted from outside. There were firs, oaks, maples, some fruit trees. You get the idea, it didn't really make any sense, but the point was that it didn't need to. I enscribed a few runic arrays around the trees, making sure they would grow like they would in their optimal environment.

The mountain was only 800meters high, but that was before my expansion charms. After having walked all the way down, there were grass fields over the bedrock, with titanic some pillars that rose up into the ceiling, that was obviously charmed to mimick the sky. That worked only in the immediate proximity of the hill however, since the time flow difference would make it a mess everywhere else. But I played with it, turning Wonderland in a place were the time that the sky was set upon depended entirely from the where, and not the when. There was a region of dawn, of mid day, of dusk, of night. In the last one the moon was always changing, but it somehow reflected enough sunlight for the plants to grow. That fucked up considerably the animals i set free into Wonderland. And so I ended up digging some more on the ouskirts of the forest, adding a layer in which the cycle day-night matched the time flow. I had all the time to do it, after all all my enchantments were somewhat dynamic. Meaning that they adapted to the modifications I placed on the enchanted object. I let myself be swallowed by the work, I would probably ended up dead from exhaustion, or aged 20 years, if not for the Stone that I held disguised in my empty orbit. I managed to tweak the elixir, so that it would also provide nourishment to my bloodstream. The four seven years old elves, born from Winky and Tummy, also helped a lot. I had the couple of house elves breed into

the depths of Wonderland, and raise their first litter, that I bound to me soon after, before sending the couple back up to Rabbit's Hole.

It had been easy enough dig a tunnel that led to the sea. Wonderland had its own little sea, and the air circulating enchantments, with the heat brought by my fictitious suns, caused the water to evaporate, it would coalesce into clouds, that would either condense against the outer borders or on the titanic pillars that literally held the sky in place. The water ended up collected in little basins that overflowed into creeks, that merged together into little rivers, that would end in lakes, from which bigger rivers that would make their way toward the little sea of Wonderland. Obviously I enchanted all the pillars, no earthquake or nuclear bombing on the surface would ever destroy Wonderland. The titanic columns rose from the ground into a pattern that had been entirely determined by the structure of the rock. I followed its venatures, I could have used magic to stabilize a pillar that I put somewhere random, but why work against nature in this case?

The clouds also were subjected to the occasional column of cold or hot air, and sometimes it rained. No thunderstorms, lightnings were rare.

Around the pillars I amassed some of the dirt I digged, placing in some of the clearings near the top sources of clear water, they condensed the humidity from the air. So I ended up having even waterfalls here and there.

From the outside world I brought in owls, several of my talking ravens, ducks and geese, seagulls, even hawks and eagles. Mice, rabbits, squirrels, bats, deers (I brought dozens of them from the Alps), sheeps and horses (I stole them from farms around all England), even some goats. Some linxes, bears and wolves, along with toads, chameleons, lizards, salamanders and snakes. I had to enchant areas of Wonderland so the environment would be right for the various kind of creatures. I brought in butterflies, cicadas, crickets, fireflies, moths, ants and several hives from the Fields Room of Rabbit's Hole.

I planted all over the place berries of every kind, roses, daffodils and dozens of others. Flowers are cool. And after having directed the rivers into a lake big enough, I placed in there few algae and fishes like trouts. Some mushrooms found their way in too.

I put to work the other three children of Tummy and Winky. The older four were in charge of Dawn, Mid Day, Dusk and Night, while the younger three had to keep track of Flora, Fauna and Waters. I named them after the seven kings of Rome, modified in case they were females. Respectively the elves were: Romulus, Tulla, Numa, Ancus, Tarquinius, Tarquinia and Servius. Pretentious, I know, but they had been deeply honoured, and humbled by the trust I showed them giving them such great responsibilities. Being in charge simply meant that they had to make sure the enchantments kept running smoothly, that the trees weren't going to be killed by a too much enthusiastic parasitic mushroom, that the animals kept a balance in their numbers, that the lakes did not undergo eutrophication. Once I started bringing in magical creatures, they would start collecting lost hairs, shedded skins and harvest the bodies once that the creatures died. At some point wand trees would naturally start to grow, and I would put in magical plants too.

One of the side effects of digging *after* having put up the time flow changing enchantments was that in those areas time flew faster or slower than the rest of Wonderland, in a random pattern. It was a very fae like thing, I loved it.

Having created it, I had a *feel* of the where I was in Wonderland and when I was in relation to the outside, but anyone else would probably get lost in five seconds flat.

I dug cave system around Wonderland, so that my 'basilisk' could reach everywhere without difficulties.

I modified the ritual to hatch a basilisk, starting with one of the Raven's eggs that I fecunded in vitro. Having a cock killing it with a crow would have annoyed me greatly. Raven could kill it with only her voice, but she had to *mean* it, and wouldn't do it unless I ordered

her to. I wrote the runes on the egg with my blood, so it would be loyal to me, and its gaze couldn't kill me or my future children. It had orders to not kill the elves, and the magical creatures I would one day bring in. It would be the apex predator, and one elf would direct him to keep under control the number of predators.

I looked at the basilisk with a grin. Miðgarðsormr had scales of a green so deep it almost looked black, and he sprouted over his head a single plume as white as a patronus, while his eyes shone of a molten silver. I hatched him under the full moon, pouring an english potion into the basin where the toad had been brooding over the egg, poking a microscopic hole in the shell, careful to not damage the yolk. I brought it in the deepest parts of Wonderland, and even with the different time flow, he was barely 4meters long. He would grow up to 30meters, probably he would never die from old age, and was able to understand english, even if he was able to be understood only by a parselmouth. To my great dismay, he had inherited his mother passion for riddles, and making those work in parseltongue was very difficult.

"I'll have to depart soon." I hissed to Miðgarðsormr. He wrapped around my waist conveying his sadness at the thought without words.

1997-05 october Mount Olympus

After two whole weeks of *listening*, I cleared up two things. One, the Greek's Gods didn't actually settled down on Mount Olympus, or their presence faded to much, or it wasn't linked to a place. Two, I hated tourism. Well, I also learned that chimaeras were awesome. But it was an off topic. Raven flapped her way on my left shoulder, covering my blind side, and croacked:

"I don't have eyes,

but once I did see.

I used to hold words,

that wished to be free.

Once I had thoughts,

but now I'm down deep.

I held my mind,

and now I'm a death sign.

What am I?"

I thought about it for a few seconds, putting away my difficulties in searching for the gods, and found the solution: "A skull." She croaked her laugh, accepting what I said as the right answer.

I reached Fleur, who was busy playing with fire, quite literally. "This isn't helping me. How are you doing?"

She let the white flame in her hands die down, slowly, deliberately, before answering me. "I told you so three days ago." she quipped.

"Yes, yes, you were right, I was wrong, no need to rub it in." I answered "Shall we leave then?" and without waiting for her assent, I apparated us to the coast, where my boat was waiting. Raven didn't like that.

I crafted it while we were still at Dawnshard, Luna had been ecstatic to lend her expertise on what was the most appropriate way to ask the wood to endure my treatment, so it could become something wonderful.

I used oak for the keel and pine for the single mast. While various hardwoods had been used for carvel-built hull and decking. I took a page out of One Piece and made it so the deck was covered by grass, enchanted to grab our feet and keep us from being thrown off board in case of tempest. The inside of the boat had been obviously enchanted, but while it was a very comfortable apartment, it really did not compare to my iron trunk. Building it had been fun, and

layering enchantments with Fleur's help had been even better. Once the sail was up, it could navigate the sky. I usually kept it 12 meters from the ground or sea below, since I didn't want to slam against an airplane, thank you very much. While the sail was down, it could navigate like a submarine, holding an impressive, not-poppable variation of the bubble head charm. I carefully painted two eyes at the sides of the runespoor figurehead. I happily named the boat Lookfar, in honor of the Heartsea saga. Obviously the heads of the runespoor were enchanted, one to blow fire, one to shed light in the depths, and one to isolate us from stray lightnings in case we were to fly through a storm.

While setting up the sail, I spoke to Fleur: "I heard there is a tournament in the USA, it starts in January and is sponsored by the MACUSA itself. There will be competitors from all over the world, I bet there will be a place for a Triwizard champion. I know you want to see where you stand in comparison to others beside me. And I wanted to meet a thunderbird."

Her eyes sparkled at the idea, before looking at me while tilting her head. "And you want to cross the Atlantic on board of Lookfar?" she asked me.

"In open ocean you could let loose that variation of Fyendfire I know you're tinkering with, while I could see if I manage to call forth a proper storm. We could head south after the tournament, reach Chile, and to Australia from there. Maybe we can reach Japan, then cross Asia and perhaps go south to India and lastly Africa" I added hopefully "But we can still make it up as we go." I concluded, with a sheepish smile, I let myself get a bit carried away. But the idea of travelling all around the globe was an old one, and the last time I heard of her, Luna was exploring the rainforest with her father, so I didn't need to stay ready to jump into the fray in England.

I raised my eyes when I felt her hand on my cheek. She was smiling, probably finding my enthusiasm amusing, but it was hardly a side of me she had never seen before. "I'm in." She answered "Even if you won't be able to participate with the Stone as your left eye, no

matter how you disguise it." she added with a light pout, that was obviously fake. We had been together for more than a year, and we dueled each other countless times. She *knew* how much she got better since then, but I had won every exchange, sometimes by the skin of my teeth, more often by a large margin. She had no idea about where she stood against anyone else, she could only see how far she came from who she once was. And she enjoyed having the occasional chance to shine.

1998-07 january

I was walking around Arizona while Fleur was busy with the papers necessary to participate in the tournament. And she was also required to spend a week in isolation with the other participants, to undergo a battery of medical tests, so that the judges could be sure that none of the participants had undergone rituals to enhance their prowess. Along with a thoroughly examination for potions.

More exactly, I was walking through Arizona's desert, looking for thunderbirds. However I noticed a very interesting tree, that I felt was *important* in some way. The desert ironwood tree was about 10 metres high, and its trunk had a diameter of about 60cm. It wasn't in bloom, but that was not the interesting part. The bark was split open, like in other old ironwoods I observed during my stroll through the desert. The tree had been split in two, probably by a strike of lightning, and had kept growing. So from the roots of one single tree, two trunks were still very much alive, with leaves of a bluish green. Raven croaked her approval in my ear. She felt it too.

"Through my eye,

beneath my feathers,

I see where Wotan did die,

from it run the Rivers.

The tall tree, showered

with shining loam.

From there come the dews

that drop in the valleys.

It stands forever green,

over Hvergelmir, Mímisbrunnr, and Urðr's wells."

I glanced at her skeptically, before *feeling* again the tree. It was special, even among wand trees, no doubt. "I hardly think this is Yggdrasil." I commented distractedly, while walking to the impressive ironwood. I let my hands run over its split open bark, feeling its every imperfection. It was clear to me that I wouldn't be able to leave it alone, and while separating it from the sky was a cruel thing, I could do it without compromising the health of the tree. "It's curious how this stuff keeps happening to me." I mumbled.

I opened my iron trunk and walked inside, preparing a place in the first floor for such a wonderful tree. I went outside once more, and with a wide movement of my wand I cut a large portion of the ground around the desert ironwood. I then levitated it into my trunk, where I put it down, before adding some dragon's dung around it along with an array to keep the optimal environmental condition around it. Raven flew away from my shoulder to perch on one of its branches. I tilted my head, noticing her strange behavior. Then I shrugged, I would study it along with the tree once I was back to Washington.

"Stay inside please." I told her before leaving the trunk, that soon found itself around my neck.

Now, how to find a thunderbird. I mused, twirling my wand distractedly with my fingers. I shrugged. *Let's see if it does work.*

I looked carefully around me. No muggles or dust clouds signalling an incoming car. I raised my wand, letting myself reach out to the sky above. Feeling the winds that were swiping the desert. I slowly directed the heat the ground held above my head, before twisting the winds so that I would end up in the eye of the storm.

It required several minutes during which I simply stood still with my eyes closed, apparently unaware of the world around me.

Then the sky exploded with a thunder that made my bones tremble, and it started to rain. I directed the falling water into a twister around me, snapping into it a few lightnings only to see if I managed to make them reach the clouds above. I pushed and pulled, and the clouds themselves started to circle slowly above my storm. I didn't contain its lightnings, happy to redirect them only when I was the target. My long coat in sphinx leather was charmed to be impervious, otherwise I would already be soaked.

I didn't want to cause an hurricane, Merlin knows if the MACUSA wouldn't come breathing down my neck. But a Thunderstorm was a good way to grab the attention of thunderbirds.

Half an hour later I started sporting a skull splitting headache. I didn't know if it was from the effort or from the battering booms my thunders rained down on me. In that moment I felt it, like it was slipping out of my control. But I wasn't even near to exhaustion, so I finally opened my eyes, hoping to spot it.

The sky was dark, illuminated only by flashes of lightning that discharged back into the clouds or on the ground around me, that was full of little smoldering craters. It looked like my thunderstorm had swallowed the sun itself.

There! I thought. And under my eye I spotted a magnificent thunderbird diving and twirling in and out of the clouds, feeling a distant screech that matched thunders that had a different *taste* in comparison to the rest of my storm. My headache forgotten, I played

with the thunderbird, and my mind gifted me the memory of the riddle I asked Raven once:

"I follow my brother,

who is much faster.

You can't mistake one for the other,

if he is the wit, I'm the booming laughter.

Who am I?"

I laughed along the next sequence of thunders, singing with the thunderbird a music that nobody else would understand without an explanation.

We must have gone on for at least another hour, but I couldn't really say, I was just lost in the thunderstorm with my new feathered friend.

At some point, I let it die down, feeling that I was tired and the thunderbird was happy with the fun I had provided.

It descended from the rapidly clearing sky, iridescent white and gold feathers that sparkled of a navy blue, six powerful wings and a head that held the sharp awareness of the predator, with the absolute confidence of someone that has nothing to fear. *Magnificent.*

I said nothing, letting the thunderbird circle me a couple of times. He was curious and surprised that a two legs managed to play with him. He lowered his head, scrutinizing me with an eye big as my two hands put together. He screeched lowly, before flapping his three pairs of wings and become airborne once more. I did notice however the feather that came down from the sky, twirling in an unnatural wind. I respectfully grabbed it and smiled, it had been a good day.

15. chapter 15: Purpose

1998-21 may

If there is a thing you got to love about over the top american events of every kind, is the black market so closely tied to the betting pool. I thought.

I was deep into my trunk, caressing the greek chimaera's egg I traded with the debt of an idiot that bet more than he could afford. I did not foresee that to be the case, but the tournament was proving itself lucrative, I simply had to bet a bunch of transmuted gold on Fleur. She started in january as the underdog, and burnt her way to the top during the six months long tournament.

I also had a lot of business in the black market. All the 13 liters of dragon blood and a basilisk fang that I had crafted into a knife. I still had for three golden snidgets. I bought four Horklumps and three pogrebins. Traded a sphinx eye perfectly preserved for a couple of nogtails. Six billiwigs in exchange for the remaining dragon egg I had. The guy was being followed and those had clearly been stolen, so it had been quite the *steal*, in my opinion. I purchased an ashwinder. And I traded a ebony and basilisk eyestring wand for three occamy's eggs. All of the creatures found themselves under time stopping enchantments in a new compartment of my trunk. Project Chronos, while far from being complete, had produced several of this very complex but very useful enchantments. The beasts would be fine until I made my way back to Wonderland.

Oh, and an unregistered animagus tradef me a whole liter of uncursed unicorn's blood, only for a vial of basilisk venom. She made me a discount. Only because she could become a phyton, and after reading my and Minerva's book she had been able to learn parseltongue, meeting with a runespoor that was now her familiar. She seemed to be alright to me, I just hoped she wouldn't become the States' next Dark Lady. But I didn't really care, we had a little

chat and we both considered the Statute to be necessary for our survival. Sam (that's the only name she gave me, and she kept her face hidden all the time) was a healer and was working on recreating the caduceus. We started exchanging letters about permanent enchantments, and since march we had a constant flow of information running between us (Fleur was obviously included, since she was better than me with enchanting.). So I made a shady new parselmouth friend.

The first month had people duelling every day, all day long. The proper tournament actually started with several duels each week since february (weekends off). The preliminares left us with 40 duellists, in february we had five duels in each week, and ended up at the beginning of March with 20 duellists. April halved the 10 winners, leaving us with 5 contestants at the beginning of may. One from Japan got a bye to the semifinals.

In may things started to get hot, an american named Smith, really original that one, faced a russian witch with an impossible surname, and lost by a narrow margin. There had been some questionable curses thrown around, and some impressive transfiguration work.

Fleur faced a strange wizard from the mountains of the Moon, in Uganda. She was the worst possible adversary he could meet.

I asked around, finding out that Uagadou students are famously skilled in Astronomy, Alchemy and Self-Transfiguration. While astronomy had some curious application in magic that influenced dreams and apparently allowed things like astral projection, it didn't really have an application in a duel. Fleur had duelled against me for more than a year, and I was an extremely competent Alchemist, who preferred elemental manipulation to transfigurations, charms or conjuring, without however disdaining them. Her fire had been more than able to meet each of those schools of magic through the entirety of the tournament, and her blue flames did not let her down, burning summoned animals, scorching the ground upon which runes had been inscribed, swallowing stunners and bone breakers alike. It was her original and unique brand of cursed fire, a strange mesh of

her enchantment that manipulated oxygen, Fyendfire and Gibraithian Fire. It was beautiful, versatile, and difficult to contain by anyone that hadn't achieved tge Perfect Eternal Flame. Everyone knew by then what she could do with it. So? It was still almost impossible to counter.

Since wands were a Roman invention, even if African wizards had adopted them as useful tools, Uagadou students preferred and were able to cast spells by pointing their fingers, even if only simple ones. The wizard had been able to use them effectively through the tournament. That didn't even ruffle Fleur's feathers, since I made use of wandless magic in a way or another since we first met. And when the African wizard sprouted an impressive snake as a tail, trying to gain an advantage in close quarters, Fleur clawed her way through it without batting an eye. Quickly capitalizing on the surprise she gained showing off her veela heritage, she wrapped the duel up in few seconds, disarming and stunning her adversary for the fourth consecutive time.

The semifinal between her and the Japanese wizard that got a bye was about to start. I put the chimaera's egg in a crate under a stasis spell, hiding it in the new rokm designated for storage of all what was illegal. Not that I would ever let anyone but me or Fleur to come in my trunk, but detection charms cluld be very specific at times, and having to go to war with the MACUSA only bevous they loved to poke their nose in my business was a very no fun situation.

The americans knew how to organize an event, but they were also a tad bit paranoid about smuggling of every kind. Not that I could blame them, I managed to acquire several unregistered wands with either nundu's whisker or Wampus Cat's tail hair, trading them for some of the ones I crafted with the basilisk I harvested from the Chamber of secrets. With its heart I had been able to craft six wands, paired with a lot of different woods. And I had still more heartstring to use, honestly that heart had been at least half meter long. I made sure to match the heartstring with woods that directed its 'will of the king' toward absolute protection, or mastery of healing,

or warding. I hoped to prevent another Voldemort. Ollivander dropped the ball with his yew and phoenix. I could relate to following only instinct and the wish to create a work of art, but you didn't see me trading redwood and basilisk's venom wands around, did you?

I had to go through some scuffles with guys that either didn't want to keep their word or wanted me to convince Fleur to lose on purpose. It had been very shady, very typical mafia-thriller movie. But I tossed the thugs around like ragdolls, tracked down the one who sent them and cut off his arms. I was a *very* powerful wizard, after all, and trying to intimidate me was something that very few could do.

I made my way out of my trunk, closing it and wearing it as a necklace, before exiting the room me and Fleur had been using as 'headquarters'. We refused to live in whatever place the MACUSA told us to, having our movements monitored was unacceptable. So we found a single room in a motel, following our modus operandi of confounding the muggle in charge and warding the accesses to the little place. It was only needed to host my trunk after all, in the same way we used the shack in the Alps before Dawnshard was ready.

I walked near the train station, using a very delicate legimency probe to look into the minds of those that were loaded with baggages. I pushed a bit further looking into minds of people that looked to be somewhat rich. I was looking for a big place after all. In half an hour, I found a family of four that was leaving for a two months vacation. Digging a bit, I learned their address: they had a whole floor in a condominium, perfect. I apparated there, presenting myself at the reception as a friend of the family, confounding the clerk at the reception. I made sure he couldn't talk about me or any of the people that would be coming to the apartment in the next two months. I reached the floor without issues, produced an enchanted wooden box in which I stored all the personal effects of the family that just left. I took a page out of Slughorn's book. It was a very comfy floor, there were several rooms for visitors, a piano, a food storage reasonably full, windows with panoramic view over the neighborhood. In short, a fantastic place for what I had in mind. I warded it thoroughly, from

notice me not, to anti apparition and anti portkey, I silenced the alarm sistem and unplug the phone. It took me half an hour. I think I saw Raven stealing an earring.

I opened my trunk once more, calling for Milky. He was one of the young elves that was born at Dawnshard that Fleur freed so that I could bond it. An elf could properly work in a house only if he was bound to its owner after all, and going around with an house elf in my trunk without having absolute control over it was something I didn't want. I gave orders to the young elf to clean up the house, since there will be guests in a couple of weeks, and warning him that Fleur and I would be living there for the next two months.

I finally apparated to the participants rooms that had been reserved to Fleur. She should be arriving shortly. "Another thing I don't like about this obsessive control they insist to have is that Fleur has to spend the day before each of her duels in isolation. Like they couldn't check for potions and rituals with half an hour of careful examinations before a match." I whined. Raven croacked a laugh, enjoying my displeasure, feeling vindicated since I apparated us both, and she still hated it. "But the imperius is a thing, so I guess I can see their angle. And she signed a contract in which she promised fair play, so it's done more to avoid the whole 'I'll make you an offer you cannot refuse' thing than for anything else." I added.

Fleur choose that moment to enter the room. I smiled at her. She was stunning, like always, and the duelling suit she wore, while mandatory, since it would have been hardly fair letting her partecipate in a basilisk hide armor, managed to flatter her unforgettable features. And I loved seeing her win aganst opponents that despised her for being either young or french. Strangely, nobody seemed to have problems with her being a veela. That kind of racism survived only in the most isolated communities (read british ministry). There had been another half giant, and a couple of werewolves. Nobody looked like it troubled them in any way. She was nervous, I could tell. Nothing obvious, she wasn't biting her lip or anything like that, but she *felt* like a bottled raging flame. And that was not the

right mentality to have in a competition of this level. She wanted to win it, and she could, but the guys left in the tournament didn't get there because they were lucky. Each of the two remaining could have held Flitwick to a standstill. Sure, my old professor was not in the shape he was as the dueling champion of his youth, but he knew some mean tricks.

Without giving her time to talk, I kissed her, conveying my support and trying to let her unwind a bit. While undoubtedly safer, keeping the contestants isolated on the day before the matches was hardly relaxing. She tensed at first, but I soon felt her shoulders relax.

I soon stopped myself, she needed to focus, and a quickie just before the match, while extremely satisfying, was unwise. Arriving so far only to fall because she had her head somewhere else or she was too relaxed to keep a proper level of awareness would have greatly irked both of us.

"He likes illusions, and will probably look for a close combat situation, but I bet he kept his best cards close to the chest. I saw him almost lose three weeks ago, he transfigured into smoke his own leg to avoid having it crushed. Don't leave him the initiative and don't overstep yourself. Guard up until the match ends, he's a trickster." I gave her what I think was a good pep talk. "You are ten times the wizard he is in a straight fight, but he won't let himself be cornered, he's a cunning little bastard, but you can probably outsmart him with enchantments all over the arena, keep your fire close, to defend. I don't think he will let you sing him into an illusion, if you manage to work on his internal ear however, it could work." The bell ringed, signalling the participants they had one minute to reach the arena. I hugged her once more, before holding her at arm length, she had never let herself be seen as anything but headstrong and confident, so her smiling gratefully at me for a talk she would never have admitted she needed was a nice sign of trust. Her smile melted in a focused expression, and I let her walk into the arena before reaching my seat.

I watched the judge panel, this was remarkably similar to how boxing worked.

The duels were held into a circular arena with a diameter of more or less 20meters. There were a few trees on the sides, and even a creek running quietly along the walls. Each match had a referee who was able to stop the fight in any given moment for whatever reason or a foul (magic forbidden during the tournament) or even ending it declaring the winner of the round if he saw one of the contestants as unable to continue. After three fouls the contestant was disqualified. Magic that caused lethal injuries was forbidden, so Fyendfire, cutting and killing curses were off. Bone breakers and overpowered banishing charms were frowned upon, but ultimately allowed. Each round lasted thirteen minutes, the first to win four of them won the duel. There was also a panel of three judges, that debated who won a round when the referee couldn't. They based their decision on points they gave during the fight to each of the duelists. They gave those in function of how many and what kinds of hits a duellist sustained or landed. But more importantly they judged the magic shown in the arena. Complexity and difficulty were two of the criteria, but effectiveness was another. And I noticed that they liked the more flashy stuff. They examined the technique and the planning shown by each duelist. They also loved to see original pieces of magic. However it was something subjective to each judge, and their opinion was ultimately unquestionable.

Someone sold my idea from the Triwizard of mirrors recording the duels, so you could buy a mirror with a recording (starting september, the tickets otherwise would lose value) simply through owl service with the sports department of the MACUSA. So my impromptu speech to shame Bagman brought someone to craft the Wizarding World version of VHS. Talk about butterfly effect. I sat in the honor box, Fleur reserved a seat for me for each of her duels. And I already booked four more for the final. Her family and Filius were already invited to the finals that would be held on the 21st of june, not that she knew it, but I *knew* what she was capable of.

This tournament was good for her, she could get a taste of different styles and break in her ability against someone that wasn't me. I expected her to win, she knew it, and felt a bit of pressure from my expectations. But I knew that the truly scary witches and wizards had better things to do than show off in a tournament. Seven thousand galleons price or not. You would hardly see here Dumbledore or Voldemort, hell you would hardly see here a random defence or dueling professor from Hogwarts, Uagadou, Ilvermorny, Beuxbaton or any of the really good schools of magic. And I assure you, they would have climbed to the top. But I thought that Fleur was one of the few that could face Flitwick and actually hope to win. One of the only two that could do it while being so young. Well, the only one, since I had cheated with RoR and Time manipulation. The more I thought about it, the more scary her growth looked. She was only 21, and she hardly dedicated herself to magic so completely before meeting me. Her ability with fire was something else. Gibrathian fire in less than two years? Meshing it with fyendfire in a working combination in less than ten years of work? Give me a break. She probably could learn to *be* fire in less than 10 years. But it wasn't something I could realistically predict. I hadn't been able to *be* lightning yet, and so I had no idea how long it would actually take.

So, when the duel started, I paid the due attention, but I lacked the apprehension that marred the faces of the Japanese wizard' family and friends.

Fleur ended the first round with a thunderclap and a blinding light, followed by a quick stunner. Stealing a page from my book. I laughed when she looked at me from the arena, but I clapped along with the rest of the crowd. It was something I never saw her do before, and she kept it a secret only to catch flat footed her adversary. That also sent a powerful message to the russian witch she would be facing in the finals: 'You have seen nothing. I am not predictable.'. She gulped down a cup of water in her boot, where a healer checked her over before giving the ok to the referee.

The second round had been more balanced, Takeda (I'm calling him that because I can't be bothered to remember his real name) managed to soak the whole arena in his illusions, making it look like a snowy clearing in a bamboo forest. Hidden in that illusion he managed to nick Fleur's shoulder with a thrown knife he summoned, and since it could have been aimed to her neck, he was declared the winner but also got a foul on his record. My witch didn't like that. Her assigned healer closed the cut without difficulties, confirming that the knife had been conjured and did not carry any curse.

The third round ended when a towering pillar of blue fire encased Fleur, before becoming what I recognized as Madara's multi-faced Sudanoo. It obviously wasn't as smooth and big, but it easily reached the four meters of height, and his arms turned into flaming wips that swiped ground and sky alike, leaving her opponent with nasty burns and a scared face.

That break lasted more than the first two, since even a healer needed some time to properly heal Takeda. I was smiling widely, the susanoo was another trick she had never showed me. I made up the name, probably she called with a name from the greek mythology, but in my head it clicked.

The fourth round was a bit less one sided, and turned into a very simple looking charms-shields exchanges, in which Fleur managed to sneak a *punch* into Takeda's face after a compress-ward-release routine, knocking him out cold. I clapped and laughed once more, I didn't know she had picked that up.

During the fifth round Takeda once again swallowed the arena in his illusions, and became smoke at the same time. Fleur stood still, encasing herself into a dome shaped shield with runes glowing golden over it. She conjured a flock of swallows that started flying in circles outside of her shield. Half a second after Takeda had returned tangible, the swallows were on him and Fleur rained fire over the area, unraveling the transfigured rock that looked like her opponent. Her shield sounded like a gong when something hit it, but it didn't even tremble. She watched her opponent impassively behind her

defense, once more, the wizard became smoke and vanished into the mist that didn't actually exist. She had basically warded the area around herself in the time Takeda called forth his illusions. She had all the time she needed to cast even the most complex spells. She was probably thinking of a way to win without showing more of the tricks she had been keeping secret. Fleur crouched behind her protection touching the ground with the tip of her wand. A few different spells hit the dome giving off loud gongs or twinkling bells. She didn't seem to care. It was then that the ground *shook*, with cracks suddenly criss-crossing the arena's floor. An impressive hiss of vapour blasted a chunk of dirt up into the air, that then fell on Fleur's dome, sliding off it without damaging it. *Maybe she doesn't care about keeping secret her other tricks.* I sure as hell did not think she would bring out the Hecatoncheire. Another sudden geyser shot through the mist in a place where I could distinguish the Takeda-smoke, who ended up flowing upward, twisting around a column of vapour that left him floating at seven meters of height. He suddenly turned back into his corporeal form, covered in blisters and burns, before falling on the ground with a dull crunching sound.

The referee was quick to call the match. *Uh, the Hecatoncheire did not make it in time.* I mused.

Fleur won, and she would be participating in the final on the 21st of June, so that the two witches had the opportunity to devise a strategy and polish up new tricks.

There was a short commentary, during which Fleur and a very sour looking Takeda gave their thoughts about the duel, before leaving space to the judges that talked about what they had recognized or guessed among the spells used in the competition. I spotted the commentator giving a 'end of the semifinal speech'. I toned everything out, before reaching Fleur as soon as she was freed from the press. She summoned her bag and I hugged her in triumph, smoke-apparating us into the new apartment.

1998-21 June

I hugged Filius when his portkey arrived. He was still a bit wobbly from the trans-continental travel, but I didn't let that stop me.

"You arrived!" I was enthusiastic, a bit desperate too. Two whole weeks with only your girlfriend family as mandatory company would have done the same to anyone. Particularly since Fleur enjoyed far too much remembering everyone of when I smoke-apparated us away from the Beuxbaton duelling tournament so that I could have my wicked ways with her. Her father and I didn't enjoy that memory. At all. But Gabrielle and Apolline loved it, so the men's wishes had been taken into consideration and ignored.

"I did!" answered my old professor and colleague. "I must say your invite came as a surprise, but thank you for having forewarned me in March, I had the time to organize the end of the year exams and put my prefect in shape to keep order in my House. And I may have bribed the other professors to keep an eye on my ravens." We laughed together.

I was just happy to see him, it wasn't something I expected to feel so strongly, but since we started working together, we started becoming friends. And his suggestions for both the Lookfar and Dawnshard had led us into a magnificent journey over the most complex aspects of enchanting.

"I didn't think you would ever spend your time watching a tournament! And you managed to get tickets, I am astonished!" he went on talking while I was leading him out of the no-apparition area.

"Well, it's more a Fleur thing, I could hardly leave her to sit through it alone." I smirked, already tasting his surprise when he saw her in the duelling robes with Delacour written in gold over their navy blue.

"Ah, so you *are* still together! I'm glad to hear it David, she's good for you. Leave the being alone to study magic for when you are more than a hundred years old." Filius quipped. "But where is she?"

"Well, her family is here too, she can't exactly abandon them, can she?" I answered "It's a pity Minerva was too busy to take off before the end of the schoolyear. And Luna is having fun with her father in Canada's forest, I met with them in April, I believe. A dueling tournament is not exactly their thing."

We arrived in an area that allowed apparition. I asked Filius to forgive me, and apparated us in rapid succession six times, using a portkey halfway through and ending the trip with a smoke-apparition.

Filius slumped into an armchair, too breathless to reprimand me.

"Sorry Filius, but the americans are a tad bit too much obsessed about where I stay, what I do, and where I go. I like my privacy. Do you have a luggage? I can show you your room before going to meet Fleur, she's already at the arena."

I led him through the muggle home I redecorated, and I had him meet with Milky. I let him refresh himself in three and half seconds with a spell he created exactly for that occasion and we were off.

When we apparated into the competitor's waiting room, he was flabbergasted. I started laughing, and Fleur joined me after having hugged the diminutive professor. In the short summer we spent at Dawnshard we managed to bond over various aspect of magic we were fascinated with. It was really a pity that Minerva couldn't be there. The Delacour family came over to say hello, and Raven left Gabrielle's shoulder after giving a croacking laugh. It was likely that she had just won again in her obsessive riddles contests.

We mingled for the following hour, and surprisingly that helped Fleur obtain a state of mind between relexation and determination. When the bell rang, we left Fleur to her duel, leaving the room looking for our seats. I spotted Sam the parselmouth among the crowd, I was surprised to see her, but we exchanged a polite nod. When we were seated, I started giving Filius a brief summary of Fleur's performance so far. He was impressed just as much as me, and was eager to see her blue fire. Everyone was expecting it, it was her signature move,

however, predictability was not exactly a problem in this case. The russian witch knew she was going to use it. So what? She still had to face it, and a proper counter did not exist. Sure, if you mastered Gibrathian fire you had a chance to redirect the flames, but you had to fight Fleur's control over it anyway. In the safety of my own thoughts, I freely called it OverPowered. I saw her learning it, but I had no idea what she could actually do, the applications were virtually endless. A month before I shared with her that for the most complex but specific spells, even if they were elemental manipulations, having an incantation helped. We both knew that 'incantation' was a fancy way to call a word that in our heads was linked to the end result we were trying to achieve.

While we were waiting for the presentations to end, mirrors started floating around the arena, showing some recordings of the most interesting duels of Fleur and Smirnov Natasha both.

I looked at Filius, I mean *really* looked at him. While he was still jovial and had still his springy step, his wrinkles had a depth that was not due to age, or tiredness.

"How are things back home?" I asked.

He watched me funny, if it was for my sharp change of topic or for the sudden interest in something I actually never cared before, I couldn't tell.

"Better than the first time." he answered slowly. "With Madam Bones at the helm the ministry is not that instrument of pureblood propaganda it once was, and somehow miss. Granger rallied behind her an impressive number of muggleborns. From what I understand, she is following what Gandhi did in India, in the meantime however, they train themselves as a militia."

He gave me an ironic glance: "Yes, the irony is not wasted on me." He said with a dry chuckle.

"Mr. Potter got them started during the last month of summer, and keeps checking on their progress every time he visits Hogsmead. No doubt on miss. Granger request. Albus is against it, but not even the Chief Warlock can order around a free citizen that does not break the law. And a 17 years old who practices magic among others adults does not give the headmaster any handle. I don't know what you told to the students that went at the ministry, but they are the head of the movement. The Weasley twins have been applying their natural talents to great effect for hiding, smuggling, crafting potions of dubious content, along other things. I have no doubts that the two youngest Weasley will join their ranks as soon as they finish their NEWTs. The 'group of concerned citizens' , as miss. Granger calls it, still does not have a proper name, but it looks more and more like the Rights of Walpurgis before they started going on rapages. There are death eather attacks, but the population is slowly reacting. Five civilians get killed for every Death Eather that dies during you-know-who's raids, but they start feeling like its the only way." He concluded.

I sighed, pouring him a glass of white wine that the Delacours brought with them from home. *French*. I scoffed.

"People learn when they are forced to. Humankind does not enjoy '*change*', unless forced. Oh, little changes, yes. But this looks like the revolution Franch had in 1789." Apolline Delacour butted in.

It was surprisingly insightful. Too often I forgot that Fleur parents, while not on the same level of their eldest daughter, were *sharp*.

I nodded my assent, the parallelism was obvious. A culture in which knowledge translates literally into power over reality is naturally disposed toward secrecy. Stonewalling knowledge meant also keeping those that would change the laws that enforced that process from positions in the government from where they *could*. Not that the purebloods did it consciously, they obviously did it for personal gain, but the only aim of the Wizengamot, like every other government, had always been preserving said culture, along with the status quo. A culture that would have been swept away in the last century

because the demographic boom of the muggle population also had meant an always climbing number of muggleborns. I could already see it: Egalité, Liberté, Fraternité. Equality, Freedom, Unity. Shout from the roofs by muggleborns that had just exterminated the 90% of Magical Britain aristocracy. Roughly a fourth of the population. Another Government of Terror. And its leaders would be young witches and wizards, drunk on their victory over the corrupted government that oppressed them. They would be sure of their decisions, and their government would become draconian very fast. They would start burning every book that explored a 'dark' branch of magic, legally invading private homes in search for artifacts. They would do it 'for the good of the people'. And worst, they would honestly believe it. Winning a government over with violence produces fanatics as its leaders. The image in my head looked more and more like a mesh of Stalinism, Mao's China and 1984 by Orwell. The new government would end up pushing for the removal of the Statute of Secrecy, since as wizards and witches we *could* help muggles, and so we *had to*. And if we didn't, then we were supporters of Magic is Might and were a threat to everything they had fought for. Utopias had a way to get out of the hands that birthed them very quickly. And Magic Britain population knew nothing of the genocides that 1900 had seen. They wouldn't even see the death they would be bringing everywhere with smile. In the meantime the governments would enter a race to gain the biggest number of wizard and witches, that would be seen as the perfect weapon for discrete operations, killings, kidnapping, smuggling, sabotage. A wizard with an imperio could kickstart the Third World War. I was worried. I was terrified. Wonderland could survive a nuclear holocaust, but hiding in there for one thousand of years, waiting for the world to settle? Radiations wouldn't give me cancer, nor mutate me since the Stone provided a perfect mythosis, but the planet would turn into a wasteland.

So, worst case of future events: Lord Voldemort defeated during the next year or so, muggleborn revolution and in ten years the complete break of the Statute.

Other option: Lord Voldemort wins in few years (I somehow doubt it). If he does not break the Statute during the war, he will after he won in Britain.

If the Statute survives the war we have the best possible combination of events: Lord Voldemort and the Ministry cripple the muggleborn movement, and Potter dies in killing the Dark Lord, bringing Britain back to the status quo.

However I came from 2019, and I *knew* the kind of technological boom muggles were going through. The Statute would fail in 30 years. 50 tops.

I needed solutions and insurances for every single situation.

I started thinking furiously. Plots of post apocalyptic fanfictions running in my head. I was so lost in thought that I ended up missing the beginning of the duel, along with the raised eyebrows around me due to the air suddenly smelling of ozone and rain.

When the duel started, I was not looking at my opponent. Which is, in hindsight, a stupid thing to do. However I couldn't miss his magic twirling the air, nor the emotion hidden beneath it. *Fear*.

I was flabbergasted, I never once felt fear from him. And I knew it wasn't fear of something that he could resolve with magic, since there would only be *determination* and *joy* in face of a challenge. *Maybe he's fearing for me?* I wondered. But no, the witch I was about to face was ruthless and did not shy away from bone breakers and piercing hexes, but hardly a real treat. And while sometimes difficult to nail down, my opponents were ultimately unable to outright win, or truly harm me. He *knew* that. So it must have been something else.

I awoke surprised of being on the ground. *He distracted me!* I wanted to yell. And I disliked being made fun of by the crowd, or giving that pityful show in front of my little sister. I ignored the healer

questioning me and made my way to my starting point in the arena, throwing a glare to David, who simled sheepishly and mouthed '*later*'. "Oh, you can bet your sorry arse that we'll talk about it *later*." I grumbled. He couldn't read lips, but I saw him smile, and it stopped feeling like it was about to start a storm.

I turned my face into a blank mask, ignoring taunts in russian that I couldn't understand from the witch on the other side of the arena. I compressed my annoyance into a thin blade, coating it with the shame for my pityful showing.

When the referee signalled we could start, I *uncoiled* my magic, and the ground in front of my opponent exploded, sending the smirking witch into the wall. She was lucky it was cushioned. The referee called my win, adding a foul to my spotless record. Fifteen minutes later, we were ready to go.

She opened with a chain that included water whips that sprouted ice shards when they got close. She had the *gall* to throw at me those shards, no doubt hoping that I would dodge in the path of another of her spells. I flexed my will, bringing forth my blue fire with the same effort one would exert to rise his arms over the head. The water evapored and the ice sublimated. I raised a shield behind the cocoon of fire that hid me from sight. I placed an illusion in my place before turning invisible. My invisibility was not perfect, David theorized that a part of me refused to go unseen, ruining the delicate control required. But I didn't need it for long. I let the following shield breaker shatter my defence, and I let my flame start dying from my left. From there the illusion of me started running away, looking almost dazed, with hair in disarray. I sniffed, like I would ever end up looking like that against anyone.

Still hidden behind my dying blue flame, I led my illusion in an acrobatic series of tumbles and jumps, circling around my opponent. When she gave me her back, I nailed her with a stunner.

Another two and I'm done. I thought. He still felt... *nervous*. Like there was something he had to do, but couldn't because he was

forced to stay. I knew he didn't particularly enjoy watching others dueling, even if I was an exception. He and I would both prefer dueling each other, but he also knew that sometimes I liked to show off. And why shouldn't I?

I had no doubt that while he found that trait endearing, he also had used it to manipulate me in accepting this travel in the new continent. It would have made more sense keeping going east from Greece. It was possible that he didn't even know why he wanted to come into the USA, maybe it was one of his 'it just felt *right*' moments. It was actually maddening sometimes. I sighed, then smirked. He managed to make the travel on the Lookfar interesting anyway. A literal interpretation of rocking the boat. Also, being able to throw every kind of fire everywhere had been wonderful, and it made possible to experiment freely with fyendfire, just like he had promised.

I centered myself, using one of the mental images David suggested more than a year ago. He told me he found it in a book, and laughed when I asked which. He joked and refused to answer, saying that if I ever saw it I wouldn't glance at *The Dragon Reborn* twice. I *did* however, notice that manipulating fire with that mental image was not only easier, but also more... natural? David believed it was the first step toward *becoming* fire. But that honestly had gone over my head, the book on souls now gave me another perspective. And while I would agree that in theory it was possible becoming an element, the practical aspect of it seemed impossible.

Noticing that once again the Russian witch was on her feet and we were about to begin, I channeled all the subdued frustration, and my other thoughts into a flame that I imagined into a void. White fire, with a blue core, burning eternally into the darkness. Like Gibrathian Fire maybe. And I started feeling... detached, and... warm, like tanning on the white sand of Sardinia.

When a volley of spells came barreling at me I barely reacted in time. And by 'reacted' I mean that I snapped open the eyes I didn't notice I had closed when I felt her charms fizzling a few steps in front of me. Like moths burnt by licks of a bonfire. I shook my head

deflecting another with a flick of my wand. That had been different. I often used that mental image but it had never been so... enthralling? I put away that thought and used one of the first occlumency exercises mother taught me when I was still learning to control my allure.

I focused on the ongoing duel, absent mindedly taking notice of the scream of frustration that my opponent had let out. *I guess my implied dismissal of her abilities irked her a great deal.* I thought amusedly.

I sent at her another wave of my blue fire, using it as a cover to quickly encase the arena in a modified bubble-head charm. I kept dodging or batting away her spells, piercing her transfigurations, all of that while I was enchanting a portion of the ground.

Three minutes later the russian witch had fallen to oxygen deprivation.

One left. I thought. I looked at the honor box, seeing Gabrielle waving at me frantically and shouting her praise for the world to hear. Filius and David were talking quickly among themselves, probably analyzing every piece of magic they had seen or felt. But they were also clapping, so I let it slide. I knew that I was hardly a duelist, stances and chained spells sequences were not my thing. And why should I lower myself? Fire worked perfectly well in every occasion. I started thinking about a possible strategy for what I intended to make the last round, when I noticed David mouthing at me while making grand gestures with his hands. *Something big?*

I tilted my head, mouthing what I had understood. As an answer: he clapped and shouted loud compliments. *I'll take that as a yes.* I thought.

When the referee gave us the go, I gave my all to defence. I raised up a dome: it looked like cracked glass, but there were golden runes sliding over it in a languid manner. A cursebreaker could break it, but it would require a seven minutes long process, and that time was

enough for me. David could break it faster, as his Atlas was overwhelming and a static kind of defence wouldn't make it, but I highly doubted my opponent could perform something on that level.

I looked at her, through my dome and her volleys of spells designed to break it, transfigure it, uproot it and *setting it on fire? Is she serious?*

Anyone could tell that she was somewhat on the petite side, with short black hair and a tattoo that crept up from her shoulder to her neck. I could only look at her, and all I could see was that she was unremarkable. Fast on her feet and true with her aim. Inventive, but only in the way she tied together different chains of spells. In that moment I truly understood why David had always refused to participate in duels with anyone but me, Filius and Minerva. *And the British Dark Lord, but let's not touch that topic.*

I shaped my will into my fire, summoning it deep underground.

It was far more interesting facing a master of his or her craft. Seeing things that you could begin to explain only to recognize halfway through your speech that you had no idea how someone could pull it off. I had a vague idea about how Atlas worked, but applying that to a real situation? It was like asking a guitarist if he could play the piano as well just because there were strings in it.

Without runes to tie my will to it, my construct wouldn't last long, but it would be far more than enough, I just had to keep its fire resonating with me.

From inside my dome I opened my eyes, taking in that the rest of the arena's ground had been split open along lines that almost draw a spider's web, with me as its center. There was superheated vapor hissing out of the fissures in a slow rhythm, almost mirroring my breathing. I felt myself frown in concentration. Making sure that the stone would bend to the *Flame* always resulted difficult to me.

With a rumbling from below and a mighty **crack** a giant stone hand rose from the ground, quickly followed by the arm. But it wasn't just rock, oh no. Among the little fissures on its surface, lava flowed like blood. The arm was four meters long from the tip of the fingers to the shoulder. The air started being distorted by the intense heat, and a second arm followed the first. I needed to let go of the defensive dome, it was becoming suffocating. The heat was not a problem, since it was *mine*, but I breathed much more easily once my defence was gone, it had started to feel *confining*, almost *smothering*.

With a mighty push of the two arms, a head made of rock rose from the ground, followed closely by an unmodest chest. Blue flames behaved like long flowing hair, weaving themselves in tresses before coming undone and opening like a mane. She stopped rising at the beginning of the belly. She was beautiful and terrible.

Eyes were molten pools of magma, slowly pouring out tears that left incandescent trails on her rocky cheeks. The tears meshed with the slow flow of melted rock that split at the beginning of the eagle's beak she had instead of nose and lips. From her jawline lava fell in drops each as big as a pony, or it kept flowing down her neck and on the breasts. Even if somewhat rocky, conveyed a *feel* of smoothness beneath the torrid heat. She opened slowly her beak, like she was attempting her first breath. Instead of a tongue, fire. Fire so white and *fierce* that it was like having the sun dawn at a meter from your face. She slowly inhaled, preparing herself to...

A familiar hand clamped down on my wand arm, disrupting my focus and making me want to *burn* whoever had the sheer gall to dare touch me. And my breath stopped. The hand that was touching me was on fire, and belonged to David, who still didn't let go. Only then I saw that he was talking to me, gritting words through teeth clenched by the pain. But when I looked him in the eye I suddenly felt *him*. Like slow rain in a day without wind, like little, warm waves from the Mediterranean sea, like a cloudy day that made you only want to sleep.

The sounds returned suddenly with a pop.

I noticed something was different from the other times only when she caught on fire. That was somewhat something worth worrying over, but *listening*, the song I came to link with her presence still played its tunes, with a slight *vibrato* maybe? But with a magic this complex it was hardly surprising. The referee almost called a stop, but when he noticed the flabbergasted expression of the russian duelist he correctly summarized that it was Fleur's doing. She wasn't screaming in pain and it was widely known that veelas held a strong kinship with fire, this one even more than the rest of her kind. So the referee said nothing, and the duel kept going.

The lava monster caught me flat footed. I thought she was going to shape the ground into a three meters tall golem with fifty arms. Maybe with a flame component since she was on fire. She was probably resonating with her Gibraithian Fire to bypass the necessity of stabilizing enchantments tied to runes.

"I had no idea she could actually do that." I grumbled, half awestruck and half envious. It was something we speculated on board of the Lookfar, during the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. Raven, that had been uncharacteristically silent for all the duration of the last round, suddenly croaked:

"I am always there, I flow with time.

I break all bonds, and forge those anew.

I'm the rising tide, and the crumbling cliffs.

I let you learn, and rule all in the end.

Who am I?"

I remember that. "Change." I distractedly answered. The last time she told it, she pushed me to enter the Triwizard. Why would she utter that riddle during that duel I had no idea.

I guessed that she wasn't so in control as it looked like when she shattered her defence to avoid suffocating. Fire in an enclosed space consumed air like you wouldn't believe. Filius and I were fascinated by her display, even more than the rest of the crowd, since we knew the bare bones of what she was doing. She was using her blue flame to collect oxygen from the air and constantly combusting it in a flow to keep the lava going. At the same time animating a giant rock golem, in which she had summoned another original and unique variation of Gibrathian Fire.

When her opponent fell to her knees and let her wand slip from her fingers the referee declared Fleur the winner by forfeit. The crowd was roaring their approval, but some people were staring at the construct with worry in their eyes. I noticed the four wizards in charge of keeping up the shield that protected the people from stray spells had started sweating. It was then that the rock-lava-fire-giant-veela started opening her beak. "This could go very bad, very quickly." I mumbled, before throwing myself through the barrier. I didn't have to find a way to bypass it, since in case of emergency outside help was considered a blessing. *Rock-lava-fire-giant-veelas and organizers actually competent, will the wonders ever cease?* I thought distractedly.

I dared not to hit her with her magic because it was possible it would kickstart the rampage of a fyendfire monster with a Gibrathian Fire core and limbs made of solid rock. *Bad image that one. Let's think about relaxing, cool things.* I thought while running toward her. I started channeling the heat around me in the Stone that rested in my left orbit. It was a slow process, but I would take all the help I could.

I reached Fleur when she started inhaling, like she was about to spit a river Mississippi's worth of white fire on everyone. I didn't dare smother her in any way and she clearly wasn't listening but I tried anyway.

"Fleur let go." I tried to convey all my trust in her ability to do so with my tone. It was calm and did not show any of my fears. She didn't even twitch at the sound of my voice, so I grabbed her arm. I just

hoped it was only covered in fire and not *made* of fire, since I would just phase through it winning a fourth degree burn on my arm in the process.

"Fleur." I called her again. *Thank Morgana, Merlin and Yoda she's only covered in fire.* She snapped her head in my direction, looking at me with blue fire in the place of her eyes.

"Fleur, you won! Now let it sleep." I gritted through my clenched teeth. The second grade burn was quickly escalating to third grade when she realized it was me.

I saw her dedicate her focus to contain the construct she brought to life, not exactly battling with it, but redirecting its will somehow. I applied occlumency to isolate the pain of my burning hand in a corner of my mind, helping her shaping the heat around us into a river flowing into the sky.

I fought with the physics of it, hardening parts of the construct as soon as lava stopped flowing into them, and cooling it down. The Philosopher's Stone helped a bit, but it was the passive aspect of swallowing heat and I could hardly enhance that process properly without showing it to the world. It was a secret I intended to keep close, letting everyone think my left orbit was empty was a wonderful and effective way to do it.

We finally reached a critical point, after which the fire on her body was snuffed away, leaving behind a very naked veela. I covered her with a conjured long white and blue trenchcoat. It had been a reflex, I didn't really had to think about it, all of me did not like the idea of Fleur flashing a crowd. So it had been easy.

The whole process of stopping the Rock-lava-fire-giant-veela? *It needs a shorter name.* Lasted barely five seconds, but it had been taxing on our minds, and my body too. So I hid my burnt hand, and after having put away my hand, I used my unmarred limb to lift one of Fleur's arms in triumph. Only then I noticed the smoking rosewood wand in her hand, to my wandmaker senses it felt... dead.

She could have burned through the core. I analitically noticed.

Her family reached us when the referee came over to give her a shiny throphy, along with a consistent bag of galleons.

I didn't pay much attention to it however, since I distanced myself and I was busy redirecting elixir of life through my hand so that my cells would regrow the holes between my bones. I actially had to resort to necromancy at the beginning of the healing process to identify the dead tisdue and remove it. It was painful, it was an agony. *Thank you occlumency.* I thought when I started working on the nerves.

I noticed that while Fleur was being hugged by Gabrielle and asked questions by the reporter assigned to follow the tournament, Filius had reached me. More surprisingly, Sam had done the same. Yes Sam the parselmouth, who was looking at the now dead cold giant stone golem like it was about to come to life again. *Paranoid parselmouths, maybe is really a genetic trait.* I snorted.

"Filius you know a lot of very smart people right?" I asked. When he looked at me funny, I lowered myself to elaborate: "Since you were a famous champion, and you have taught at Hogwarts for years, you know a lot of smart people all around the world. People that care about magic. I'd like to meet them while I travel around, so if you could writeletters to the ones that you think could be intrrested in my project..."

The half goblin looked lost in thought for a few seconds, before he answered me: "I dare say I know a lot of people that would enjoy a chat about magic with you, David. And after today, with miss Delacour too. But it would be easier if I knew what your next project will revolve around."

He was teasing me, but in a very Ravenclawish way, digging for informations. Sam, while trying to not look like he was eavesdropping, had assumed a posture that screamed 'I am curious

about this'. Looking at her, I grinned. "Don't worry, you will probably be on board of this one." I told her.

"If we are lucky, the Statute is going to break in fifty years. If we are not, in less than five. So I want to find a way to make it last as long as possible, while preparing insurances for when it will fail." I started explaining.

"One of wich is colonizing the moon."

Raven landed on my shoulder, and croacked:

"I am always there, I flow with time.

I break all bonds, and forge those anew.

I'm the rising tide, and the crumbling cliffs.

I let you learn, and rule all in the end.

Who am I?"

16. chapter16: The start and The end

1998-11 july

Luna was humming a tune I couldn't follow while skipping ahead of me. We were following a path carved into the undergrowth by pack of wolves following pattern over the years to find a prey.

The Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska was the largest national forest in the United States at 16.7million acres, 68,000 square kilometers. Most of its area was part of the temperate rain forest, itself part of the larger Pacific temperate rain forest. Naturally, the forest was so much bigger without actually occupying the planet's surface that it was hilarious.

The last part was what muggles didn't know, they were sure of the rest however. And it was even mostly true. The important element few considered, was that the forest had been there since the last ice age, with a few humans walking on the outskirts of it only in the last centuries. In a place full of life, like that titanic forest was, nature sings its own tune. And where humans do not thread, magic learns to dance.

Never constrained, never marred by muggles or wizards, the forest had grown. Every single tree , young or old, held more sway in the deep of the forest than any human could ever hope to understand. It was defined as an old-growth forest, also termed primary forest, virgin forest, primeval forest, late seral forest, or forest primeval.

Not to say that the forest or the single trees were sentient, no, but they were undoubtedly *aware*. I walked with the same calm and caution I used to soothe down Fleur at the end of the tournament I refused to stray from the path, because while I knew I could survive anything that forest had to dish out, I also *knew* that disrespecting it would be just as damning as killing a unicorn's foal. I had never been one for respecting what others see as holy, but that place was a

sanctuary. As a wandmaker, I felt it clearly as I could feel the earth beneath my feet, the dampness of the air. I also knew that while I could treat the forest as the treasure trove it was, I shouldn't take more than what was offered. So when I found a few strands of hair that I recognized as belonging to a Wampus Cat, I did not try to follow the trail, I gratefully picked those up and kept quietly enjoying my walk with my younger friend. Raven was being a coward and sat on Luna's shoulder, preferring the quiet acceptance the forest was offering her to the slight contempt I was being held in.

Luna was Luna however, and where she went the air around her felt *watchful*, the leaves seemed to shift slightly to better allow her passage, or swayed gently to the rhythm of her tune. If a fairy ever achieved higher neural functions, it would behave like Luna. That was another reason why I was walking in the cold forest without a single defensive charm wrapped around me, and without any of the clothes made from a magical creature that I owned.

Walking so deep into that forest wearing basilisk hide? I would feel like an invader, come to become the king of the forest in the same way the basilisk was the king of snakes. Dragonhide? I would feel like a bringer of fire, it did not belong to that place. Sphinx leather? Sphinx were the result of experimental, ritual interbreeding between humans and lions, and as such, an abomination in the eyes of that vast forest. Veelas were beings of fire and as such Fleur didn't feel at ease in there, and had preferred to stay at the camp Xenophilus and his merry band of researchers and explorers had set up months before.

Knowingly or not, Luna was the one leading the two of us, not otherwise. Even if she kept dancing around trees that were impossibly high, old, strong, beautiful, and watchful. From time to time we walked under a tree that recently lost a few branches or twigs. I picked up something here and there only when it felt *right*. However I didn't think I would find the right wood for Fleur's wand there, she would be chosen by a beautiful and almost delicate wood, with hidden strength.

The ground did not make any sense. Sometimes I was walking uphill, sometimes i slid down what felt like a grass covered cliff. It was maddening. Or it would have been, if not for the kindly reassuring tune Luna was keeping up. It was almost like she was humming for my benefit, letting the forest know me through her eyes.

After a while however, I felt like Luna had held my hand long enough. I was respectful, but not cowering. So I let myself *stretch* outwards, tasting the air, the leaves, the bark, the pebbles. I was *there*. And Luna was a little sister I never had, and I loved Fleur fiercely, and I could be the stormy sky and the rider of the rising tide. I was not going to *hide*.

I started humming too, very much like Luna, only with my soul-voice. Where she was kind like a fluttering leaf, and sweet like morning dew, I was stubborn like a neverending rain, and loud like a bokming thunder. But I was also as purposeful as the wind that carried pollen, as youthful as spring rain and as old as the idea of snow.

All of that, in hindsight, makes me sound like an megalomaniac hippy on a acid trip. I'm well aware, however words can only do so much to describe what it *was* to be *there*.

There were thousands of western red cedar, sitka spruce, and western hemlock everywhere. Limestone and granite that made the ground beneath the soil also made hills and caves. Creeks became torrents and ended up in little waterfalls.

We reached the pacific coast, and when Luna stopped humming, I knew we had left the forest's area of influence and entered something that *belonged* to someone else. And it was quite clear, since we were suddenly walking into a garden that held a distinct *mediterranean* feel: myrtle, elderflower, laurel trees, I even spotted an olive tree or two. The hut had grass over its roof, and was situated was a few hundreds meters from the sea, where the artificial climate seemed to return normal, with the lush green grass leaving space to the barren coastline. There was even a little rowboat, resting at the end of a frail looking pier. Another sign that something

was off were the fluffy bunnies scuttering around, and a bloody goat munching on the roof of the hut.

A man left the hut, raising his hand in salute. A salute to Luna, since he didn't know me. If I didn't know better, I would have thought him an half giant. He was bald, with a nose so crooked it was clear it had been broken several times over the years. His head was covered in scars, probably each could tell a different story. They were little and crisscrossed him completely, even his closed eyelids sported tiny silvers of scar tissue. His magic felt... sure? Like a river, he knew where he was going. But it was more... big? Maybe? It confounded me. The fact that he was keeping his eyes closed added itself to the mystery of the hermit.

He brought his closed eyes on me, humming a deep tone of disapproval. "I know Luna." he said. "Who are you?"

At that point Luna started talking about gibberish, like she did when she was extremely happy about something and didn't know what to say. It was probably her way to show to us that she felt comfortable enough to talk, and so that there was nothing to worry about. I was saddened by the fact that she felt she had to calm us down (in her own way) before we even started to talk. I eyed the white crystal butterfly she carried in her hair, thinking about a way to reassure her that neither I or her other friend would cause harm to each other or the rest of the forest.

"I am a fellow wizard, and I don't know why I am here." I introduced myself.

Luna stopped talking when the old giant (in all but blood) slowly nodded, since he knew Luna, that I followed her there without questions made perfect sense. "Let's talk quick." He rumbled. "It looks like it's about to rain."

Luna went silent, smiling happily, picking up a rabbit that scuttered around her feet and snuggling it into her neck. I didn't expect an

hermit to offer me tea and cookies, but I did hope we would sit inside to talk with some measure of calm.

I sighed. That man was old, even if he looked only sixty, everyone develops his own quirks. Hell I had those, and if someone came uninvited at Rabbit's Hole I sure as hell would not let him inside, common friend or not. So I calmed down.

"I am here because Luna thought we could be... friends?" I concluded, making my statement sound like a question and looking at Luna, who most helpfully hummed a catchy tune. The old wizard arched an eyebrow, unimpressed.

I sighed, thinking about why Luna would lead me to meet this hermit in particular. She was playing riddles with Raven when she had suddenly asked for a stroll among the trees. And she had been fidgeting for a few hours before.

Why does Luna do things? I asked myself.

The only event that popped into my mind was when she gifted me the mermaid's hair for one of my wands, and the necklace made with butterbeer cups.

What do I know about how Luna thinks? I then asked myself. And I realized that everything she did, or told, in her mind was seen as extremely important. When she walked following the shape of a shade on the ground, when she put her wand behind her ear, when she talked and when she stood silent. All of those were extremely important things. So important that she left whatever place she inhabited in her mind only to make sure those things happened exactly as she pictured them. So it stood to logic, and even to Luna's unique brand of logic, that the meeting between me and the old wizard *had* to happen. And she made sure to lead me there in the (probably) best circumstances. So, maybe she was trying to help me with something important. The only 'important' thing I was working on was gathering of very capable witch and wizards.

I should go with that maybe. It's not like an hermit would tell anyone. I thought. I only knew that Luna believed this to be important, so I would try my damnest to get him on board.

"I think the Statute of Secrecy is going to fail in the next thirty years. And the muggles are slowly killing the planet with their machines and pollution. I am putting together a group of fellow concerned wizards and witches to prepare ourselves the best we can. And I think Luna brought me here because you would be interested." I explained.

The big old wizard hummed thoughtfully for a couple of seconds. Then he finally opened his eyes, showing me blank pupils that could no longer see, surrounded by irises of the deepest blue I ever saw. Not the blue of the summer sky, but the one of the deep sea, heavy and unknown.

"Muggles are always killing the planet. It was true when I was a young lad and it will be true after I am dead. I don't care about the Statute. I stay out of their way, they stay out of mine. I've been living here for more than a century, never seen a muggle that someone looked for after he disappeared." Answered the man.

"You have been here for more than a century?" I asked, not in disbelief, but to buy myself time. A century alone with only his wand for company could make strange things to the human mind, magic or not. He closed his blind eyes, humming disapproval once again.

"So you know nothing of the nuclear warheads. Of the two world wars the muggles fought. Or that if a third one begins, the planet will become a poisonous wasteland. There won't be trees, or seas, or animals. Only barren land, with air charged by the radiations that will kill everything. Wards or not, places like this will vanish." I slowly explained.

But I knew while I was saying it that he didn't care enough, he was old and the world survived before him. So it would survive even after. And he couldn't understand how much the world had changed in the last century. Luna brought me here to help. Maybe to help not only

me, but this man that refused to tell me his name too? What could I do?

"I can make you new eyes. So that you can see how much everything has changed." I offered, in what I felt was a brilliant solution. I knew the difference between 2019 and 1995, he was in for a shock. And it would give me a reason to try out some of the solutions I had devised when I still thought about crafting myself a new eye. *I love it so much when I can play with magic.*

"If I wished to steal myself new eyes I would have taken them already." He grumbled. "They wouldn't work."

I was flabbergasted. I didn't even think about stealing eyes. Who was I? Madara fucking Uchiha? No thank you.

I frowned, but answered with a kind tone nonetheless: "I would make them. Not steal them, it's true that they wouldn't work, eyes as a part of you need to be attuned to your magic, stealing them may work on the short term, but they would start failing a year after at the best. I did find out a better way while I was researching how to find a good replacement for my left eye. Besides with the eyes of another you couldn't even change shape, so if you're an animagus like in my case it would be annoying."

I didn't know what, but I said something right. The old wizard posture changed completely, and I passed from being held in contempt to being regarded with something akin to interest.

1998-04 september

Nathaniel Hathaway was a strange, strange wizard. The hermit Luna presented me vanished in the moment we started talking about building a new Atlantis at the bottom of the ocean.

I still wanted to colonize the moon, but it would be good practice managing to create a little safe environment deep underwater. Turns

out Hataway had been a sailor. An halfblood from an unknown wizard, he was birthed on a ship sailing through the Atlantic. He was born on the 16th of July 1775. So yes, he was old. It clearly was something magically enhanced, wizard didn't age more slowly than muggles, Dumbledore was born in 1881, and he showed all of his years.

I didn't think he was an immortal, but it would have been rude of me asking. I sure as hell wouldn't want just anyone knowing that I had a Philosopher's Stone. So I speculated that he tied himself to the area where he had built his hut. In a way that reminded me how I bound together Dawnshard and the newborn Chinese Fireball. There were probably drawbacks. I didn't believe he could leave his home for more than a season for example, and I suspected he couldn't sustain himself with food that hadn't been produced on his land. It was something I did never consider before.

I would never do something that dangerous, if I were to unleash fyendfire on his home I would also kill him. I didn't think anybody could destroy Wonderland, but in my opinion was a stupid risk to take. For now I would keep going with the Stone in my left orbit. A solution would present itself.

He attended Ilvermorny, had a few lackluster years in the MACUSA, working at the department of control of magical creatures, before heading out to the sea on a stolen sail boat following the coastline up til Alaska, where he built his hut, in 1788.

He told me a bit of history I didn't know. Surprisingly, Ilvermorny was founded in 1627, and the school was originally just a rough shack containing two teachers and two students. Ilvermorny was originally a stone cottage constructed by Irish immigrant Isolt Sayre, and her No-Maj husband James Steward. And he told me that he had even smuggled stuff across the countr for a couple of years, apparently it was really fun. Muggles had no idea they were trying to catch a wizard.

He was the worst case of muggle baiting I ever heard of, but since the jeans I wore were stolen, I had little room to complain.

Then he told me he started to sink whaling ships. Because the 'disgusting practice' was the worst example of greed he had ever witnessed. And I agreed with him, mostly. Whales had been hunted almost to extinction, but sinking ships was, in my opinion, not a very effective way to deal with it. And I guessed history proved me right.

I naturally asked Nathaniel how he managed to sink ships without the MACUSA finding out. Say what you want, but at least one survivor would remember a wizard destroying a bloody ship. From what I could tell of his story, he went on for years. He gifted me a feral smile, and brought us on his little boat.

So I watched, as once we reached what he deemed was a 'safe distance' from the coast, he dived into the chilly ocean.

I kept looking into the freezing waters for minutes, and finally, I noticed a grey shadow moving from the depth.

Less than 10meters from the boat I was standing on, a white whale rose from the waters.

I had little doubt that it was Nathaniel, since the sperm whales had been hunted to almost extinction, and the scars that covered the entirety of the beast were clearly the same ones that marked Hataway's. I couldn't be sure, but he was easily 20meters long.

When he broke the surface of the waters, I simply stared, dumbfounded.

Luna set me up with Moby Dick.

2000-07 january

Miðgarðsormr had grown, but it was understandable, given that during his whole life in Wonderland, his time had flown faster than mine in unpredictable ways. I speculated that he was now three or four centuries old. He obviously remembered me, since my magic permeated the air and at the center of it all my Gubraithian Fire burned brightly. Besides, in a sense I was my familiar, and he was born from an egg gifted to me by Raven. My familiar for some unexplicable reason layed eggs only when she choose to. Her biology was a clusterfuck as a side effect of the ritual I used to hatch her. I was glad that for some reason the biological imperative that lead animals to mating was completely absent in her. I shuddered at the idea of a murder of ravens with her inherited behaviour. Riddles were fun, but asking them all the time was tiring. And somehow the passion for riddles was in the blood, since even the now 15 meters long Miðgarðsormr seemed to love them. I had to limit myself to the ones that used terms that he knew something of, since he hadn't been hatched in a pensieve full of my memories that somehow would have been absorbed.

I shook my head, focusing once again on the problem at hand. Miðgarðsormr was growing fast, and I was glad that Wonderland managed to sustain his hunger without problems. Between the population of predators that constantly needed thinning and the packs of deers that crossed the land, there was no shortage of food. Once I finished adding to it the animals and magical creatures I collected during my travels around the world however, space was going to become a problem. While I could keep digging, I had the feeling that it would be better if Wonderland became functionally independent from me. So the point was turning my creation in something that would grow in function of what it needed. I rubbed tiredly my forehead. It promised to be a nightmare.

Starting from what I knew about eternal independent enchantments: they existed only for things that had been built while the magic was being wowed into them. Since I wanted Wonderland to be able to grow, a static enchantment wasn't going to cut it.

Eternal dynamic enchantments worked for homes where their master resided. Like for Nathaniel's abode. They could be tricked with the presence of the owner's Gubraithian Fire. And it was what I had done to Wonderland. The Eternal flame would die with me however, and it did nothing beyond keeping in place enchantments I built previously, helped by the elves I bound to me. Perhaps using the elves as a focus could help. After all at Hogwarts they were bound to the castle, that kept its enchantments always going thanks to their presence, along with the wizards and witches that spent so much time in it. Maybe we were going somewhere. The elves had a symbiotic relationship with Hogwarts. The castle magic fed off their presence and benefited from their care in the same way the elves were fed and nurtured by the castle. However the elves followed Dumbledore's orders as the Master of the castle. Which was an inherent title that came with the Headmaster position.

So finding a way to bind together elves and Wonderland was a sound idea. However the number of elves necessary for it would be around several hundreds. And elves worked at their best in domestic environments, primeval magical forests were really not what they thrived into. And they would still need to answer to a master of some kind. And the whole point was making sure that Wonderland found a way to grow, survive my death, and to keep it protected from the outside world.

The Tongass National Forest was somewhat alive, meaning that all the souls born in there were somewhat tied to the one of the much greater forest. In the same way cells were part of a human body. And the forest protected itself, in a way. At least in the more magical areas of the forest, fires died faster than normal, and I had felt extremely unwelcome.

I remembered suddenly about Rick Riordan's novel. He wrote one, in his saga of demigods, about an evergrowing, everchanging labyrinth. I remembered it was tied to the life of its creator, Dedalus. and that was something I wanted to change for my Wonderland. The idea of finding a way for my creation to grow worldwide, with some

everchanging doors appearing and vanishing in random patterns, was mouth-watering. But I wanted something that could outlive me.

With enough time Wonderland would come to be alive like the Tongass National Forest. But even with the overwhelming number of magical creatures I was introducing, it would require several millenia, I hoped that the time bending enchantments would speed up the process, but I couldn't be sure.

The point was still finding a way to make it not reliant on my 'voice' to survive. Nathaniel's way to immortality had been binding himself even more strongly to his home, and however he did it, it wasn't what I wanted.

But I did bind a Chinese Fireball to Dawnshard. So I just had to find a way to make the relationship more symbiotic between Miðgarðsormr and Wonderland.

I didn't know if a basilisk could die of old age. And this one had unicorn and wizard blood in its veins, so I had no idea how that would turn out. I just needed to find a way to tweak my Philosopher's Stone so it could produce an elixir that worked for the basilisk, I would be reassured twice that Wonderland would not die. Better yet, crafting a new modified Stone, that I would somehow make sure only Miðgarðsormr had access to, a solution similar to mine would be the best one, maybe encasing it into his palate.

The problem was that the Stone could not be 'programmed' to synthesize the elixir on its own. I used my will to direct it in the correct way, but while Miðgarðsormr was certainly intelligent, he was only a magical creature, and as such, magic was seeped into his body, and he could not direct it in the way I did.

I could find a way to make Miðgarðsormr capable of parthenogenesis, maybe triggered by his own death. I didn't want a rampaging army of immortal basilisks running around after all.

2000-04 april London

He remembered that place, I could tell. He was almost disoriented by the changes he could see. And upset, I believe, even if only for a silly little thing like that. He had always been tightlipped about his life before he learned about magic at eleven.

He told me about Hyde Park once. When we were still on the Lookfar in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, years before. It had been between the Fyendfire experiments I conducted in the morning and the music lesson I gave him in the afternoon.

I smiled wistfully at the memory. It was still when he believed he could learn how to weave enchantments into a song.

I had been explaining him that you need a 'place' in yourself where you can root your mind before starting on such a branch of magic, otherwise the music can steal you away. He laughed then, with his full, uncaring laugh that today made the dew itself dance. But he listened to me, like he was supposed to. It was then that he told me about Hyde Park. It was a place where he went before knowing about magic, where he could sit under a tree and try to move the leaves. He called it 'bubbly' in the summers but still 'not pretentious' like the Hogwarts grounds.

Nobody but me could have noticed it, but his tells had become 'loud' to my listening, as he insisted was the proper name to define sensing. His soul voice was stirring, digging deep underground to bring up its memories of what happened. But it wasn't in the way his magic moved, it was in the quick blink of his eye, in the silence of Raven, in the invisible tensing of his right shoulder, like he was prepared to summon forth his silly spear.

"Dumbledore royally dropped the ball." he then said. I didn't answer, I had known he would have wished to return home someday, for all his talking about leaving people suffer the consequence of their actions, he still cared about his homecountry. Or about the home of Filius and Minerva anyway. His tone was grave, and I couldn't tell if

he was referring to his homecountry situation, or more simply to the destruction of the place he had once considered the right one to make his first experiments with magic.

The park was burned grass and uprooted trees, scorched earth over which weighted the smell of smoke. It was a cauterized wound in the middle of London. Luckily the muggles believed to the gas leakage story, but to anyone who knew where to look, every cracked stone screamed 'magic'.

"This can't be allowed to continue." I murmured, gently running my fingers up and down his left arm. I know he didn't wish to interfere, and I understood him, mostly. He said once that wrath is for the young, and that he was old enough to have lived twice. He wasn't one to fell pray to blind fury, it was one of the things that I liked most of him. But he was saddened to see the war of our war spill among the muggles, and ...*irked* that they destroyed that park in particoular. "The Statute is going to fail if they keep this up. We're not ready."

He sighed, patting my hand. *Patting my hand! As if I am the one that needs to be reassured now!* I scowled briefly, he should learn to recognize loss, and caring only about me and magic, while largely true and flattering, was not the way I wanted him to live the next day, even less the next millennium. I didn't even know if it was healty.

When he watched me with a raised eyebrow, I knew he had understood the true reason beneath my scowling. And he was reminding me that I behaved the same. I wrinkled my nose in response, he shouldn't be able to reprimand me with only a glance. But well, I did the same.

I uffed. "We'll have this conversation another time." I warned him.

He smiled then, and that tiniest bit of coldness that the wounded London caused him vanished.

We were about to apparate away, when I stilled, looking to our left. Following my gaze, he tilted his head toward the new possible treat.

We stood still for a second, then the figure apparated away.

"Lord Voldemort knows I that I am back, it seems." He commented with a thin smile.

Hogwarts did change. Not in the way the castle looked, no, the walls were still the same as I remembered them, even he didn't dare to assault it, not with the old warlock still in his seat. Even if, after the rumors we overheard, that particular obstacle in his plans would disappear soon. I didn't miss the stone warrior with the bloodstained spear that was standing on guard in front of the doors.

I smiled openly. I *did* miss Minerva and Filius both, and I could recognize their hand in the tweakings my the result of my craft had been subjected to. I listened to it, and it was clear, that whatever had made the spear extraordinary in my modest opinion, had been extended to the stone warrior, that sported a crack on the left side of his face that had took away is eye. I didn't know if it had been done purposefully, or if I had poured too much of me in the spear when I made it.

The doors opened for me without problems, it looked like they still remembered with ...*fondness*? The castle seemed to remember my tenure as DADA professor. I smirked a bit. *I bet that the other professors are not hold in the same regard.*

Fleur interrupted my musings: "The sooner we finish here, the better."

She was right, letting myself fall prey of sappy moments would only slow us down. I had a war to finish. The question was only for which side I would be fighting for.

17. A brief War Meeting

I've been away from this story for a while, and seeing that I have 1k followers, I would be remiss in not warning you about the slight change of tone of this chapter in particular.

This whole fanfiction has been about magic more than anything else, the events and interactions among characters, few as they've been, exist only to showcase this or that tidbit of magic. Which was more or less my first aim for this story. Now, I can't completely ignore Voldemort, and while I am eager to return to an 'only magic' fic, it will take a while to find back my steam. Since the last time I wrote 'The Bigger Picture' my english got really better, so this should make the readers less willing to lynch me for my frankly horrible grammar.

This chapter will be very short, mostly because it's about people, and in this story I have no patience for it.

Have fun, or don't. Like always, I don't care!

2000-04 april Hogwarts

The professors loung had been repurposed as a war room, so the oval table had few maps on it, an enlarged, modified copy of the Marauder's Map had been stitched to one wall, a blackboard was propped up in an angle of the room, the fireplace had been enlarged to allow better floo-travel, and the shelves now sported a collection of topics war-related: from healing to cursing to ward-breaking.

I couldn't care less.

The meeting was set to begin at 02:00 pm, and from what I had been able to gleam from my chat with Filius, it would be a cross between a

recruitment campaign and a resume of recent events. The Order, which now apparently lead the war against a ministry that *everybody* knew was under Voldemort's control, would later contact those that proved themselves insightful enough to actively help the war effort.

What I had to say would probably not sit well with anybody. But still, being early, I wasted no time in seating down next to Minerva, while I saw Fleur happily chat Filius' ear off.

"So, I'm 1,85cm and weigh 95kg, easily, with my clothes and whatnot, I easily hit the 100kg mark. As a fox, I weigh less than 30kg." I started, slipping my notes to the Transfiguration mistress while doing so.

"The question is, where does my mass go when I change? Where does my spear go? It sure as hell does not become a part of my fox form. And my armor do not translate into my other form, Hell, the only thing that stays is the silver patch I wear over my missing eye, and I spent months in making sure it would do so." I kept talking while Minerva bullheaded her way through my notes with the experience of a master of tge art with decades of experience at her fingertips.

"You believe there is a... storage space when you are a fox? Somewhere around you?" She frowned a bit.

"The storage space clearly exists, it's a given, but since every wizard and witch can become an animagus, but for werewolves, veelas, metamorphomagi and whatnot, such a space is either a side effect of everyone's magic, or an unforeseen consequence of the process that makes us animagi." I pointed out the simple measurements of weight between my two forms.

"The process is far too well documented and studied, it doesn't have any part that could play with space manipulation, not in the scale you are suggesting, it's a transfiguration of the shape, the nature of our identity is used as a fulcrum." Minerva thoughtfully objected, skimming over my last theories.

"So a magic soul naturally bends space around them? Like gravity does?" She asked when she reached the part in which I compared the change of mass to the difference between the weight of an enlarged box with the mass it contained.

She was quick on the uptake, it was one of the reasons *why* I liked her that much: "Yes, it bends space, but not like gravity does. I'm putting together a think tank in regards to this particular topic, and I'd love to have you on board."

Minerva pinched the bridge of her nose after having removed her reading glasses: "I fear I am a bit too busy with the recent events to dedicate time to theoretical research, as much as it pains me to admit it. You always manage to find the most interesting topics to delve into."

"Hello, professors." A somewhat familiar voice took my attention away from my chat with Minerva.

"Ah, Miss Granger, Mr. Potter and Weasley, take a seat, we're all a bit early are we not?" Filius welcomed the infamous trio to the room.

"I would have waited outside but..." the nineteen years old Emma Watson said, making me shake my head: *Hermione. Granger. Not Emma. Watson. I haven't been caught with my guard lowered since Maggie Smith gave me my letter.*

"You couldn't help but overhear a chat about advanced magical theory." I chuckled, it was honestly endearing, in little doses at least.

"I was thinking that between you three professors, and the Headmaster, there could be a way to make a ward that suppresses dark magic." She offered a thick bundle of papers towards her former Head of House.

"Yeah, it's called a cheering charm." I snorted, peeking over Minerva's shoulder.

"Excuse me?" She frowned, not understanding what I was saying.

Before I could cripple her pride outlining how incredibly idiotic her proposal was, Fleur cut in: "A shield-ward cannot be implemented to recognize the intent behind a single spell."

"Not without using a soul to empower it, at least." I mused out loud: "Giving sentience to a ward..." I started muttering before noticing the frozen expressions on everybody's face.

"What? You can program a computer, not a ward. And you need it to be alive for it to be able to distinguish between harm and not harm." At least I supposed so, a magical artificial intelligence was something I wasn't going to touch with a ten foot pole.

"I believe everyone was offended by your hypothetical callous treatment of a soul, dear." Fleur kindly brought me back on track.

"Well, I've not played with the soul of others," *If you don't count mine and the pieces of Riddle* "But that's the first thing I can think of that would likely work. Maybe it would work with a kneazle's soul too, can't know without experimenting."

"That's... That's awfully dark professor." Hermione was cringing in her seat.

"Is gravity light? Is magnetism dark?" I retorted tiredly.

I raised my hand to interrupt the girl before she could chew my ears off: "Magic is a fundamental force of this reality, it just is."

"Now, *intent* can be malicious, but it is subjective, your evil can be my good, don't you agree?" *Oh, how I love phylosphy*. I thought to myself seeing her outraged frown.

"But an immoral use..." Hermione stammered out before I cut her off again.

"There is no morality, a person can be your friend or your enemy, or to better explain, right or wrong. Every living being acts for its own good, and all that goes against that good is classified as evil." I elaborated the previous concept.

"Morality isn't just words!" she wanted to rip my lonely eye off, I was sure.

"Isn't it? Every living being classifies everything in 'good-for-the-self' and 'bad-for-the-self'. This bleeds over and gains more connotations the higher one climbs the sentience-ladder. An amoeba classifies stuff that it can consume as good, and stuff that it can't as bad. A slug classifies leaves as good, the distance between itself and said leaves as bad, its shell as good, and salt as bad. You classify your friends as good, because they sustain, protect and love you, you classify the other side of this conflict as bad because their existence and possible victory implies the realization of a reality which you would classify as bad."

"But you can't deny that what they are doing is bad!" she shrieked again.

"That's clearly not the point I was making." I sighed, my fingers drawing little circles on my temples.

"How does it feel? To not believe in anything? To have nothing to fight for? You're spineless!" The unmistakable genius of Ronald Weasley of all people accused me.

My lone eye went from the bushy haired bookworm to the redhead: "Oh? Another that does not listen. To my system of reference, your conflict with the other faction is *bad*. Either of you can win, I don't really care, you are here in England to prove a point, not because you must, or need to fight."

"How dare you! I must fight! He killed my parents!" *Aaand we're back to the shouting match.* I noted in the safe boundaries of my mind when Harry Potter butted in.

"And your granfather killed a bunch of Grindelwald' soldiers, you don't see them here trying to kill you, do you?" I asked sarcastically.

"That was war, the things Voldemort has done..." Hermione tried to tone down the exchange.

"Are war crimes." I completed what she was saying: "Whether you know it or not, he was fighting a war, still is, and your parents were fighting on the opposite side. They too didn't have to fight, they stayed, putting their son at risk, to prove a point. Nothing more."

"And that point would be?" Potter was gritting his teeth, trying to reign in the urge of drawing his wand.

"That they wouldn't 'run away'. Now, I don't know how you think, but the world is a big-ass place, humans are 7bilions and counting, and especially for wizards, if you don't want to fight, you can *move*." I tried to repeat my point.

"So I should leave the innocent to die, is that it?!" He rose from his seat with rage painted on his face.

"I haven't ever, nor I will ever, pretend to tell someone what he should do with his life, your choices are your own. Voldemort is not destroying the planet, only taking over a country too spineless to fight back. And you are here, fighting, because of your parents, but I assure you, that the dead wish nothing, nor they do feel the need for revenge, and your staying here forces your friends to do the same." I rose from my seat in the same way, albeit keeping my composure.

"Move to Australia, or Canada, I don't know, and I don't care, the problem here is not who is on the right side of the war, nor who is winning, only that you went this close to completely shred the Statute of Secrecy, which would cause a shitload of problems for people that are actually mentay stable." I suggested, making my way out of the room.

I have more important things to do than to cater to the whims of an angsty teen put in a position of power by spineless dumbasses. I thought to myself.

"See you at the Rabbit's Hole, Fleur." I waved my hand over my head, knowing that she would stay to at least hear what were the recent happenings.

Insufferable dimwits. I thought bitterly while making my way out of the castle.

I knew that while my magic was of a terrifying quality, and the shit I could pull unrivaled by anyone. I also knew that my more impressive feats were spells that took months or even years to be completed, it was stuff that I could pull only in Wonderland, the 'reality' in there incredibly supple to my 'voice'. I wasn't a fighter, never been a proper one, I was a researcher, a bit mad one, for sure, but I was no Voldemort. That was why I hoped to push Potter to deal with Old Tom before sweeping in and reorganize Magical Britain, the way his scar was burning red to my senses however, made me uneasy. Dumbledore was likely wounded, I could see no other reason why he wouldn't be there early to play his 'I'm holier than you-games'.

I could survive pretty much anything short of a Nuclear Bomb, but winning a straight fight against Tom? It would be a problem.

But Hermione might have had the right idea... a sentient ward to deny a kind of magic...

It was worth investigating.

18. Project Phoenix

I sat down in a comfy chair in my study in Rabbit's Hole, thoughtfully looking into the distance.

Discarding the general limp wrist-ness of the Order, and the general annoying behavior of Golden Trio of Crusaders, my mind had started hammering out the possible ways to craft a sentient ward. It would prove itself invaluable against Voldemort. I was a great wizard, I knew that, I thought and did stuff nobody else even thought about, but I remembered my only encounter with the madman. My knowledge placed me squarely beyond the reach of the common wizard or witch, but he was far from being common. Sure, application of Project Chronos would give me a leg up, and likely allow me a sneaky kill. But what if that branch of charms failed when brought to bear against the might and absolutely certain will of Voldie? I wanted an insurance. Or a weapon to guarantee my success.

But what kind of weapon could surpass a wand? A staff? Somehow, I doubted it. Besides, I planned to live forever, I wanted either a weapon that I could improve over time, or one that grew to match my evergrowing skill and depth of knowledge.

Tiredly discarding my wishes about a proper magic Gugnir, my thoughts found themselves hovering around the concept of identity, choosing to overcome the challenge of sentient ward before the one about a super-weapon. After all, to shackle a muggle's soul to a ward would be pointless, only because no-maj lacked the sensibility to magic necessary to distinguish a spell from another. Besides, an enemy wizard would hardly cooperate in my endeavor, even if whatever resistance would be ignored once the soul was turned into a ward.

But then again, why would I need a human soul? A kneazle had enough instinct to distinguish between good and ill intent, which was

good enough for the purpose of a no-dark-magic ward. Granted, it would be a no-violent-intent ward, but still, I had to start somewhere.

My thoughts slowly gravitated towards the problem of making my basilisk functionally immortal, trying to follow the new possibilities that sentient wards could open.

"There are two forms of eternal life." I stated, black ink moving from a glass pot to the journal opened in front of me, the black words gleaming wet under my single eye.

"One based on a functionally immortal body, and one based upon an identity that does not fade after the destruction of said body." I mused out loud.

"Not only, but said identity must be able to interact with matter for it to be considered 'life' and not some form of ghost." I rose from my seat, my eyes never leaving the sea that spread itself from the feet of the cliff.

I could go with a Bladerunner. Crafting a biological copy of my body shouldn't be that hard, or at least, I could grow one in a gestation chamber. Making it a cross with a pensieve would likely allow my memories to bleed over and my identity to imprint itself over the blank soul of the uncscious but living body. I frowned a bit, that would create a clone of me, one that valued what I valued, and not someone prone to sudden megalomaniac conquest of the world. Using my replicant for a ward was... dangerous.

Still, it was risky, unless I created some sort of binding geas on my replicant. But magically creating another me and then enslaving him sounded like a sure way to create my worst enemy, only because I knew I would not rest until the threat to my freedom wasn't erased. Besides, I knew that my identity was formed during the course of my whole life, and as much as my enhanced memory could go, it was far from being a perfect recollection that allowed me to recall the sound I heard while in my mother's womb.

Then again, memories gave context to the present, their purpose wasn't to be perfect. I knew I was only a voice in my head, and that I was a result of many forces, events, thoughts, situations, hopes, dreams, disasters.

"I need to capture myself several witches and wizards... erasing their memories and thusly making their identity go blank would allow me to superimpose my identity on them, *then*, I could play with sentient wards." I mused again.

Having a sentient me to take care of Wonderland and Miðgarðsormr would have been wonderful, if not for the fact that *I* perceived it as an annoying chore, and thusly my clone would as well. Besides, I wanted Wonderland to be self sufficient, and Miðgarðsormr to be self reliant, besides being immortal. Finding a way to make the basilisk capable of parthenogenesis.

Enslaving a grown wizard was a big no-no, since Wonderland answered only to my soul-voice, kidnapping a newborn wizard and imprinting my soul over his would work, but Miðgarðsormr would be lethal to any that didn't share my blood. Having a son with a random witch and repeating on him the process was the best viable alternative, I could raise him *in* Wonderland, fifteen years spent in a section where time went slow the most would allow me to pass 15 years in a matter of weeks for the real world. But still, resentment was something that could come up easily, being born only for the purpose my father envisioned me for would certainly have pissed me off.

And while I truly believed magic to be the most important thing around and its research worth a lot, but I didn't want to actively harm innocents. *The not innocents however...*

Kage Bunshin à la Naruto? It could be done through golem built with my blood as a bonding agent, but they wouldn't have the ability to interact with the magic necessary to direct a philosopher stone to secrete elixir.

It was an annoying coundrum.

Cloning myself and sharing the burden sounded like the most reasonable thing to do... but I didn't *want* to do it, it wast the whole point why I was looking for a way to build an avatar of my will.

Better get started with sentient wards, maybe a solution will present itself. I resigned myself and left Rabbit's Hole leaving a note for Fleur which read 'Gone Shopping Test Subjects'.

I apparated to Diagon Alley, the hood of my sphinx leather trench coat keeping my features hidden under an unnatural shade. The place was going to hell, most of the shops either closed or with a very washed down appearance, due to vandalism, robbery or whatnot. The infamous Weasley's joke shop was a ruin, not that it was a surprise, the only places still open were the Cauldron and Gringotts.

I frowned while walking towards Knockturn Alley. How do the owners of an activity survive? Everything is shut down, economy is likely gone to hell, I wonder what is of the Ministry? Every wizard of witch to properly work aren't wealthy enough to survive without income. I wonder, maybe the war forced them to realize that they didn't need to work in first place?

My thoughts left me as I entered the district of ill repute, noticing the infamous Borgin and Bruke open for business, as well as several other shops along the way, from the dirty poor pubs to breweries (for potions) and armories. There was even what I suspected was a shop for selling muggles. *Gods this place went to shit very fast. But then again, the mooks of the 'evil' side need a place where they can spend money, otherwise how could the nobles purchase their servitude?*

I was almost relieved to see that Voldemort wasn't completely bat shit crazy. Or that at least he had someone to keep at least a few activities running. I wondered if Hogsmeade was the same, or had all the 'good' people gone to work in Hogwarts?

The differences from the books were staggering, obviously a dragged out war hadn't allowed Voldemort to stay completely hidden, likely forcing him to do several appearances, and placing someone he could trust to keep the Ministry running.

Dumbledore, on the other hand, not being dead due to my having removed the Ring from Gaunt's shack, had likely become a rallying point for both those in search of protection and those who wished to fight. He likely had organized a smuggling ring to send those unwilling to lend a hand beyond the pond. I wondered why the ICW hadn't yet jumped into the fray. Or if it did, how in the nine Hells did it manage to fuck it up.

I dropped my musings and listened around me, reading myself to impose my will on the world while I crossed the thresold of what looked to be the less shitty pub in the area.

The conversations inside, from the drunken and boisterous to the huddled and whispered stopped for a second, taking in the new entry.

There were several small round tables, enough to fit two or three persons each, while in the middle of the room a long table had benches at its sides, likely for the single drinkers. The barman and likely owner squinted at me with bleary eyes from the end of the room, where he served drinks upon a dirty plank of dark wood.

My eyes followed what I was hearing, the misshapen choir of desperate and violent men clashing against the wary hunger of what I suspected was a vampire. The single squeak of a couple of hags resonating with several werewolves drinking boiserously in their side of the room.

All of my observations happened in that single second of silence, and were organized and classified in order of the danger they could pose. The elixir running through my veins would have likely stopped me from turning into werewolf or being turned into a vampire, mostly because the Philosopher Stone in my eye secreted it directly into my

bloodstream, and thusly granting me an awareness of each of my cells that was beyond what a common mage could hope to grasp. Even knowing, no, speculating so, I wasn't eager to try my luck.

I rolled my shoulders, thinking about my plan of attack. Sublety, not sublety?

"Is anyone here a murderer or a rapist?" I asked loud enough for my voice to be heard clearly by everyone.

And while I tasted the palpable surprise in the air, the sudden spike in fear of some, the interest toward an opportunity of violence of others, my lone eye zeroed onto a group of what my mind identified as 'mooks'. Jackpot. "Four winners, lucky me." I drawled while strolling leasurly towards the huddled group. From the way they bristled and instinctively tried to retreat on their seats, and the way they were clutching their wands under the table, I suspected it was a mixed group.

I wasn't a master at legimency by any stretch of the term, mostly because I lacked occasions to practice, but willing myself into their minds was hardly difficult. It wasn't like a switch, nor like flipping through their memories, but the colors from the eyes I met melted into images that I saw as a third person.

Why are memories seen in third person? My mind noted down the new topic of research, while another part of me observed distractedly the memories my words had summoned.

I didn't bother giving to either them or the rest of the people in the pub any kind of warning, they were far from being innocent. Even so, they two seconds between my questions and the moment in which the air smelled of ozone.

Ionized plasma crisscrossed the air around me in a cocoon which blossomed around me and stunned everyone in a radius of several meters. Painfully.

Without stopping, I twirled my wand in a circle, *pushing* every one against the walls and grabbing the two collapsed dumbasses that were the closest to me.

With a crack, I was gone.

I reappeared out of the front door of Rabbit's Hole, before opening the door and tossing them inside, summoning both portkeys and wands from them. The feeling portkeys gave off was always strange, difficult to place, like a rock ready to skip on water. Even so, finding out that the mook on my left didn't have any portkey on him lowered a lot his threat level.

My eyes fell on my desk, where the note I left for Fleur sat untouched. I shrugged off her absence, it had been only a few hours after all.

I dragged my two prisoners down in Wonderland, and only then a memory from the books came unbidden to my mind: "If I were to stab you, I wouldn't harm in any way your soul." or something similar. And again, it made sense, a soul was a property of 'identity' in the same way gravity was a property of matter. The shape of your body had an impact in forming your voice, nothing more.

So, just to be on the safe side, I removed their arms, not that they would need them, and it made me more comfortable knowing that they wouldn't be able to arm me, not grabbing a wand, nor punching.

Since I was already there, I didn't think they would ever need legs, so, I painlessly removed those too.

FLEUR

The meeting, once it actually started, had been long and tedious, and since David had run away to play with magic, I was forced to

attend, if only to be informed about the actual state of things in the dreary and sad place that was UK.

Dumbledore had joined the 'war room' once everyone was already present.

He looked like he aged 50 years since the last time I had seen him, deep bags under his twinkling eyes, but I observed that Minerva and Filus looked extremely tired, the brief moments of respite David and I managed to give them talking about magic went a long way towards making them *sharper* during the meeting.

I was surprised to hear that Hogwarts had been returned to his state as a castle. The whole resistance against Voldemort's army was stationed at the school, their families, friends, and also people who just didn't know how to escape without getting caught.

Apparently, inside the ministry there were means to track apparition, and as such people were smuggled away from the country with complex means and procedures that had been kept quiet. From the way the half-giant Groubdskeeper seemed to preen however, in my opinion it had something to do with the herd of Thestrals David had told me about.

During the meeting, I noticed that Dumbledore kept a mediator role, what I didn't expect, was that the two more vocal members at the table were Amelia Bones, who sported a clearly recent wound on her face, and Harry Potter himself. Now, I understood hope, advertisement and whatnot, but placing such an emotional kid in any position of power seemed... well, David insisted that I called dumb shits dumb shits, so... it looked like some dumb shit to do. At the table there were several muggleborns of various age, which clearly were being enlisted for the war.

Uh, living in the castle meant that the voluntaries, which were clearly being manipulated in signing up for *their* war, only had to train and being deployed, either to free this or that camp where muggleborns and politic prisoners were herded in, or to employ hit and run tactics

on Knockturn Alley, which apparently was the the only central hub of activity left in London. Well, beyond whatever happened in the ministry.

Surprisingly enough the war had assumed two well defined armies, even if Dumbledore's side had a clear split in charge between Bones and Potter, all in all, I was hardly impressed.

Granted, Hogwarts was *the* stronghold, and manned with enough witches and wizards, it was a scary one. Giving that children who had yet to be brought outside of the country were being taught all kind of things to not hinder the resistance, and that the volunteers were being drilled by masters of their craft into how weaponize every single spell they knew... the potential was there, and it was obvious to see why Voldemort still hadn't succeeded. Potter regularly led parties to exterminate Acromantulas and whatnot from the Forbidden Forest, so they had that covered, there was some shifty magic hovering over the Black Lake, and I wasn't sure about the kind of magic the Grounds were interwoven with.

I could hardly estimate who was in a winning position, after all I had no idea of what kind of resources Voldemort had. Even so, I would say that the resistance did not hold the tactical advantage, they were holed up in the castle, executing raids and expeditions over territories that they couldn't properly check before their attacks, and they had to risk their scouts each time they wanted to check up an area. Voldemort's side didn't have that problem, each Manor of a old family could work as a small stronghold from which running operations, and it meant having a force constantly watching an area.

Sure, wizards and witches weren't actually limited by distance, but keeping a constant presence was an important psychological aspect of the war, and talking about psychological warfare, the Prophet was still the ministry's mouthpiece.

I rubbed my eyes while strolling out of the main gates with the group of hopefuls recruits, I was going to look around the half abandoned Hogsmeade before making my return. We were being watched

during all the duration of our visit, and we had been allowed to poke our noses around, even if under surveillance. It was an efficient tactic for recruitment, no doubt, these people would either talk others into join them behind the safe borders of Hogwarts, or sell the untrustworthy information to the other side.

For example, being told that Potter regularly led people in the Forbidden Forest sounded *a lot* like a bait.

I could see Bones' influence in this tactic, she had been a politician for a while, and she had clearly picked up on the importance of misinformation.

All in all, it didn't feel like they were close to the resolution of the conflict, one way or another. Which meant that if deemed necessary for it to end soon, we would need to step in fully, or at least with a significant amount of resources, which we really couldn't afford.

Too many, I counted at least twenty other wizards in black garments working in teams of four, shuffling and weaving in a circle around me and the others that managed to survive the first attack.

What could they gain with an attack at Hogwarts doorstep? The whole army opposing them is stationed here. Like I did once before,

"At the end of the day magic is intent. Being a mage means changing your surroundings, making it so that your voice has enough impact not only to be heard, but to make it sound more legitimate than what already is." David taunted me.

"I only asked how did you dodge the stunner you couldn't possibly have seen." I objected to his explanation, which like always only raised more questions.

"So... you hear the intent of the spell?" I asked after a while.

"Nothing so exact, but if you can recognize the feel of your surroundings, or... white noise, if you prefer, then what disrupts it should catch your attention." He retorted.

I had tried since then, again and again, and it was the only reason why I threw myself on the ground.

To the passive awareness I had of my surroundings, the sudden spark of violence resonated *wrongly*.

While I was falling, I twisted on myself, trying to apparate to Rabbit's Hole, and only then I noticed the *rigid* tone of an Anti apparition ward.

I rolled on the ground, my wand already in my hand while I felt my features sharpen. Expertly ignoring the instinct to rip and tear with cruel beak and glinting talons, I collected the fire that blossomed over me in a dome, keeping it in place with my off hand and vanishing the chunk of the ground I was sprawled upon, falling for a couple of feet and effectively dodging the second deadly volley of spells.

I took a deep breath, and with a twitch of my wand, the dome of blue fire poured on the ground like a flood, before flashing of a bright white.

The disillusionment washed over me like cool water, and I endured the uncomfortable feeling in order to shot out of my temporary trench. Bunkering down meant renouncing mobility, and I couldn't afford it, not when it was clearly an ambush.

I exploded the ground in a random area and transfigured some of the dirt, butterflies with silvery, reflecting wings grabbin the attention of the attackers, if only for a brief moment.

There were too many, I counted twenty between wizards and witched, all in black garments, operating in teams of four.

I rained cutting curses just to gain a second of respite against the two teams that singled me out, and with the experience gained through countless spars with David, a dome like cracked glass with golden runes sliding over it in a languid manner stettled down around me. With a twist and a sharp flick of my wand, mounds of dirt rose from the ground while being transfigured into stone, before immediately falling through the dome and being carried around on its surface, intercepting killing curses without needing me to keep up a hovering charm, needing only my recognition of the Unforgivables to act upon them. *A sentient ward would be really useful now.*

I banished my wistful thinking and took a second to organize my thoughts, looking around, searching for allies to swarm the enemy from Hogwarts' Grounds. Only then I saw the enraging flames over the Forbidden Forest, fiery animals of every kind rampaging through the canopy, a thick black smoke quickly rising to blind the Sun.

Waves upon waves of my blue fire forced the aggressors to stay away from me, while the survivors tried to rally around my position, and for all their determination, the only thing they were proficient in was hindering me.

Constant hard work bring results, strenght of will matters only when accompanied by a strong foundation. The voice of David sounded again in my head, and given the pityful display, I couldn't not agree.

I needed to either find those mantaining the anti-apparition and portkey wards, which was impossible in the chaos of the battle, stall the enemy until reinforcements from Hofwarts came through, which I couldn't be sure of since there was Fiendfire devouring the Forest and aiming for the castle, or win on my own.

To win on my own meant finding a way to either tank or divert spells coming from different directions while retailating. And if my opponent wasn't organized, or even a single team, I wouldn't meet much difficulties, sadly it wasn't the case.

I defended myself, almost single handedly dispatching wizard after witch, finding or creating disruptions in their otherwise flawless teamwork and capitalizing on them. After five minutes, I realized that not only help wasn't coming anytime soon (the fire over the Forbidden Forest now climbed higher than Hogwarts towers), but that the distraction that the other rebel-hopefuls had provided was about to end, since less than ten of them still struggled to stay alive.

I *inhaled*, and the air around me answered, howling with a vengeance and churning around me at speeds that forced back those Death Eaters or mooks foolish enough to get close.

The column of air ignited itself above my head and sprouted wings, the head of an eagle as big as an airplane opening in a cry of defiance.

It was then that I felt a sudden spike of *danger danger danger* coming from the Forest, my eyes found him immediately: pale, deadly, with red eyes that seemed to glint even from the not insignificant distance between us.

Voldemort joined the fray with a volley of curses that made the air wail in protest as his black smoke shape covered the distance in mere seconds.

I dropped my beautiful defence and matched him, directing myself among his soldiers, weaving and dodging following my instinct. The talons on my free hand and feet shred, while my beak ripped apart those too slow to avoid me, even while many of the fools that dodged without checking their surroundings got hit by Voldemort's spells.

He *hissed* in rage and sprouted a blue light from his wand in a very specific pattern, causing the people around me to run away, leaving only three men with silver masks behind.

Some of his lackeys wasted no time and immediately I witnessed a somewhat squared purple barrier rising around us.

I ignored the bigger threat and kept closing in on my lesser opponents, not giving them any occasion to take a breather and organize an attack.

I ducked under a killing curse from my left and pivoted on my right heel, extending my left leg and enjoying the feeling of my talons gutting a surprised death eater. At the same time, I unleashed a blinding flash from the tip of my wand and a small gout of fire from my free hand.

In the first three seconds of this new confront, I offered two meatshields, not bad.

I didn't allow myself to rest, eliminating the numerical advantage was my priority: a blast curse on the ground saw me skyrocket towards the last Death Eater, what David had dubbed my lightsaber spearing through the last weak enemy I had to face, ignoring the instinctive shield he put up when I blinded him and burning through his chest.

"Insolent half breed..." He hissed, and I ducked under a volley of sickly green lights that would have spelled my death.

Then I felt it.

A twist in the world behind me.

I didn't have time to curse, but 'Shit' was my first thought.

I turned on myself, my wrist blurring through tight movements and my will shaping the reality behind me in something heavy, solid and unyielding. I felt the sheer *pressure* Voldemort was exercising against my wall and matching it with my refusal to bow.

I was about to charge ahead when I was forced to throw myself aside to avoid an unexpected purple mist that screamed '*deadly*' to my senses. I didn't even see him summon it, but I observed the ground wither and die under it.

Once more, I knew that the first thing to do was to take away his numerical advantage. Conjuring a silver jar and manipulating air into a vortex to collect all of the purple mist took me two seconds. While doing so a wall of blue fire tried to sweep away Voldemort, who cut through it with what I could see as disdain.

While shredding my hasty attack, he somehow animated the corpses I left behind, sickly yellow light flashing through their wounds and from their eyes.

I clicked my beak in a cackling laugh and I switched the jar with a stone in the middle of my enemies, just in time for the purple mist to overcome the filmy prison I conjured and swallow the necromantic constructs. With another hiss, Voldemort slashed his wand and the mist disappeared, replaced by a wave of *nothingness* that cut through air and ground without resistance.

I dodged, closing in and lashing forward with a swipe, my hand coming few centimeters short from his throat, the talons on my left foot clenching over the his thigh and digging deep, looking for his femoral artery.

Something moved behind me, I felt it slash one of my otherwise pristine wings. With an enraged cry I dropped low, my leg never leaving its prize while my wand ripped apart the world behind me. I pushed forward and straightened my back suddenly, my free arm redirecting Voldemort's wand while my beak closed in on the arm he tried to backhand me with.

An enraged yell drowned everything around me and hurling me through the air.

I got back on my feet a bit dazed, spitting the two fingers that I bit off. If my current features allowed me, I would have smiled.

It was clear that I was victim of a tactic thought for Dumbledore, being trapped in a barrier with Voldemort was obviously a way to give him the time to deal with powerful opponents without being

hindered by others. Escaping it sounded like the smart thing to do. And when my eyes landed on the evergrowing mass of savage, cursed fire devouring the Forbidden Forest behind Voldemort, I knew what I had to do.

The fire was many things, hot, warm, hungry, violent, bubbly, homey, violent, unrelenting, hurtful, soothing, hopeful, outlandish, terrifying, reassuring. I inhaled, my voice resonating with the rage outside, and sung. I sung of days in the desert made of sand and neverending tiredness caused by the heat, of supernovae and thirst, of droughts and explosions, I reached for the pit of my stomach, visualizing a tiny ember. I went with my mind to my memories and feels of the heavy heat of a sun that didn't now mercy. The sheer dryness of the air, the scorching heat of a fireball signing my hair during a scuffle, the reassuring warmth of a campfire. The stones turned cherry red into the fire that we dropped into a pot of water to make stew the single time we cooked instead of the elves. The hunger of the three days without food or water that I forced myself to endure in order to master Fiendfire. The *need* to grow. The burning sensation of muscles in the middle of a fight, the scorching hot feel of punches grazing me. I felt the change more easily this time, my blood *growing* hotter and climbing up from the pit of my stomach, looking for fresh air to consume. Carefully and slowly, I controlled the output, constricting the fire so that the only direction it could grow into was outside.

And protected by a heat so vast and free that Voldemort's spells sizzled out. Or maybe they hit me and passed through the fire that I was becoming, flames so white and *fierce* that it was like having the sun dawning from my chest. I slowly inhaled, preparing myself to be free. I saw the Fiendfire outside washing on the ground, rampaging in my direction.

I recognized the purple dome holding me prisoner with Voldemort crumble and die, but it didn't matter, even when the anti portkey and apparition wards disappeared, it didn't matter. Nobody would run. I was going to *burn* the space they wanted to either compress or punch through.

I let go, my heart beating its steady rhythm and the air once again entering and leaving my lungs. I called forth my will, freeing the song I was cradling like a newborn inside of me.

A column of wall of white-hot fire blossomed around me and turned into a bird of prey, its wingspan easily covering ten meters, the vast phoenix flew in an upward spiral, faster and faster, the flames naturally evolving into a fire twister, copious amounts of vapor, generated from the water the puny snake tried to drown me with, sucked in by the vacuum generated by the air-consuming magic.

The white flame however, was so hot to burn the hydrogen and oxygen that composed the vapor, growing upwards with a song made of howling wind and crackling fire.

I didn't wrestle with the flame, I didn't need to force it to develop only upwards, each second felt as long as an hour, and time lost any meaning, lifetimes flashed like dying embers around me, I was free, I *was*...

Then I could only hear the otherworldly solo made of howling wind and crackling fire, over a soundtrack of melting bones, vaporizing water, and the enraged scream of Voldemort. From within, a never ending typhoon of fire engulfed the world and nothing more mattered, the vast mass of Fiendfire rolling under me, asking for guidance, but it wasn't needed, why would I need control? I only needed to... need? I *was*.

SAM

Iceland is one of the most active volcanic regions on Earth, where almost all types of volcanic and geothermal activity can be found. The volcanism on Iceland is attributed to the combination of the Iceland plume hotspot activity and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge activity. Iceland's landscapes forged by the processes of volcanism include rift valleys, geysers, hot springs, rhyolite mountains, columnar basalt

formations, lava fields and lunar-like craters. Instead, subglacial volcanism has created table mountains in northern and southern Iceland. I read distractedly for the third time the summary of the environment I set myself to study.

The most interesting part of Iceland's geology, was without a doubt the volcanic activity. Or at least, it was the feature we could exploit more easily. When David had explained what project Atlantis had been about, I called him crazy. That was all there was to it.

Then, maybe stupidly, I allowed him to explain. And the shit he said, along with its rough calculations, had ensnared me.

He wasn't the first to build himself a house underwater, during the course of History, there had been plenty of bat shit crazy wizards and witches to do so. From ten to fifty meters underwater, it wasn't so difficult. Hell, I met a witch who lived in a submarine she stole from the Soviets during the second world war.

But he wasn't content with building himself a house underwater, oh no, he wanted it on the bottom of the sea, and not the Mediterranean, but at the bottom of an ocean! Which meant the problems decuplicated themselves every time I stopped watching.

First thing first: the pressure, water weighted one ton for each cube meter of the stuff.

Few dozens of kilometers south of Iceland, the Atlantic Ocean was around 4 kilometers deep. Which meant that on each square meter 4000 000 kgs wanted nothing more than squash you.

That was without considering the way most spells turned out wobbly once underwater. *'It's only in your head, even if the cold, darkness and pressure may have some impact on the world soul we are worling with. At least within the area we're talking about.'* And David explanations were only more worrying. He talked about the world like it was alive, which was worrying, either because he was crazy, or because he was actually right.

I rubbed tiredly my forehead, repeating myself that at the end of the day, I volunteered, it was honestly a fascinating challenge, and whatever we learned trying to make it work would allow us to push the limits of magic even more.

Once we managed to set up a reliable and stable dome of breathable air at the bottom of the ocean, and only after we found a way to employ the heat taken from the magma just beneath the site, another big ass problem would be finding a way to make the travel between sites easy.

Then there would be the experiments on life sustainability in such an artificial environment. And the fact that David had called dibs on setting up the underwater ecological cycle had reassured me only partially.

For now, my task was to find a way to allow witches and wizards to dive for long periods at impossible depths, giving them a way to breath water which contained an unknown percentual of oxides and whatnot, and since I was already there, David had suggested I found out how submarines worked, and tried to replicate the process, on the side, I started reading up on Iceland's environment. After all, the vast number of active volcanoes on land would likely be similar to the end result we would obtain at the bottom of the ocean.

Luckily enough, we already had solutions for that problem, David himself having researched it and gifting me the Lookfar to study, but still, I had a lot of problems on hand.

It was in that moment that the circle on the ground made for long range apparition David had set up for himself lit up in a flash, the aforementioned wizard finding his balance while holding a jar to his chest.

I would have welcomed him with my usual snark, but his face gave me pause, and then my eyes fell on the glass jar he was holding.

Inside, a white and blue flame burned *distraughtedly*.

19. De Rerum Anima

2000-04 April - Iceland

I appeared without difficulties in the spot I had set up months before, and dedicated an instant to take in my surroundings. While I managed to better the portkey-travel, it was still uncomfortable. But then again, humans weren't meant to cross thousands of kilometers in seconds.

The study was relatively cozy, even if quite large, it was 8 meters long, 10 wide, furnished with heavy back wooden desks, shelves and armchairs with red velvet cushions, it had walls and ceiling painted of a cream white that gracefully reflected the light coming both from the several lit braziers and the little iridescent magelights that I had taught Sam how to cast.

There was a single unlit fireplace in one corner of the room, while the opposite one presented an admittedly out of place jungle like environment. My eyes found the runespoor without difficulties, busy as he was with lazing in the damp warmth.

There weren't any windows, but given the fact that we were underground I didn't feel trapped, my fox form coming through with its appreciating the area.

I carefully placed the jar on an empty desk and turned towards Sam, which was studying me with ill hidden concern from beneath her cowl.

Her eyes, barely discernible from the light wet glint they gave off from hunder her deep hood, landed on the jar, before turning to me: "I still had six months to make the gillyweed potion work better, and I doubt you solved England's unrest in a couple of days. Why are you here?"

I sighed, reaching for a case of Jack Daniels and pouring myself a glass: "Fleur got into a fight. A big one, she tried out her trick to immortality, it didn't work out, and she's stuck halfway through."

Sam blinked owlishly, before looking toward the jar of glass. She rose from her seat and went to gaze into the glass jar clearly interested.

I sighed, massaging my temples: "I don't know how to help her, what to do, what to do?"

"I was before the world began,

and will be forever after,

I was when they invented fun,

and almost always I matter.

Your youth I used to attend,

and I mitigate your grief,

the industrious and sloth I befriend,

and of most I am chief.

You can use me while you may,

because for no man I stay." a familiar voice croaked.

After a rustle, Raven left the folds of my trenchcoat, landing awkwardly on the desk and looking at me like she was expecting an answer.

"You need to stop sneaking in my coats, you stupid bird." I sighed, while my mind was already processing her riddle.

Sam walked back to her seat and offered me a glass with two ice cubes and filled with what some kind of whiskey. I scoffed before drinking it. *It looks like a good time to get drunk.*

"...time?" I answered to Raven "You suggest to give her time?"

Her answer was to flap her wings and dip her beak in my drink. It was the best answer I was going to get.

I sighed again, taking away the glass before Raven could manage to get her feathery self drunk. I shuddered at the prospect.

How to help Fleur? I wondered. The truth was... I had no clue. I was ages away from feeling comfortable with the idea of becoming an element, facing the task like Fleur had been forced to do... It was a testament to her skill that she managed to hold together enough of her self so that she was a flame separated from the world-soul wide concept of fire. Raven was right, Fleur was in a better position to master her transformation. My understanding of souls was solid, but manipulating one with the skill necessary to not worsen the situation was beyond me. *For now.*

Luckily, I had been playing with the soul of one of the creeps I had kidnapped not long before. Completing the sentient-ward project would undoubtedly give me an insight to the inner workings of the soul, so I would likely learn something that could help her.

After a week spent wondering how to help Fleur, I gave up, and left her in her unbreakable glass jar, with an added constant alchemical process around its neck to extract Oxygen and Hydrogen out of the air, the exalathions of the fire would be reprocessed and recycled, all of that worked off the heat Fleur was giving off.

I was deep into Wonderland, in the simple hut I built for myself in one of the areas where the time flowed at its slowest, thinking about what to do. More specifically, I was inside the time room of my trunk, which was placed inside Wonderland itself. I wanted to solve Voldemort and Potter' pechant to destroy the Statute of Secrecy as

soon as possible in order to be able to return to more important things. Helping Fleur among them.

Originally, I would have carefully chosen a side of the conflict, however, Voldemort attacking Fleur squarely put my guns with his opponents. I knew that in war you didn't care for who the soldier in front of you was, Voldemort stopping from attacking her had never been on the charts, not only because mercy or respect for me didn't extend to those close to me, but also because he likely didn't even know who Fleur was. I realized perfectly that it was just... business? Or something like that, I sure as hell didn't stop before butchering his Death Eaters. Even so, I kept finding less reasons to not attack Riddle every time I revisited the topic.

A chat with my favourite dark lord was necessary, if only because steering him in the right direction would have been an extraordinary boon. But I knew him well enough to know that whatever alliance I managed to strike would last until he suddenly chose that betraying me suited him better, his frayed mind wouldn't allow anything else. So, before directly facing Voldemort, be it for a parley or war, I needed to find a way that would ensure my victory.

The 'sentient ward' project was promising, extremely so. Wards could be imposed only over things one had a claim to, be those areas, rings or whatnot. Still, wards to repel magic attacks worked without any kind of filter. A ward to protect my house from spells couldn't distinguish between Wingardium Leviosa and Avada Kedavra. The only notable exception was the Patronus, that managed to cross wards without issues.

In the books, a Patronus reached the warded area where Bill got married, and another reached Grimmauld Place, arguably one of the most secure places after Hogwarts and the Ministry itself.

Why? Because it wasn't a spell like the others, obviously. Expecto Patronum summoned a warden made of positive emotions, but why would it assume the shape of an animal? And even then, why the shape of that peculiar beast?

It was specific to each caster, that went without a doubt, but why?
Why why why?

I knew that the answer to that line of reasoning was an important one. Said answer was likely the reason that set the Patronus apart from other spells. It would allow me to understand why a ward would allow it and no other spells to cross its boundaries. It was a critical information.

The animal reflected the brightest side of our souls. *Souls...*

In the last book, the shades Harry summoned with the Stone 'acted like Patroni'. Maybe I was on onto something. The Patronus was an esoteric magic, an expression of the soul, in a way no other charm or transfiguration could be. The latter were shaped by will, they leveraged on several elements around them. A charm to impose change upon reality, a tranfiguration to coerce it.

A Patronus was inherently different: it brought something that was already there into the world. Our brightest side existed before the summoning of a Patronus, and while its appearance had undeniable effects on the world, it didn't directly either coerce nor impose a change directed by the will of the caster. It was a manifestation, nothing more.

So, manifestations of souls could cross wards. Okay, I could work with that.

Wards were constructs of will, souls were inherently closer to the World-Soul, and as such had hyerarcy working for them. In a sense, will was two dimensional, soul 3-D.

Voldemort didn't snipe people with AKs across Hogwarts' wards because the killing curse was a charm. It imposed the will of the caster to *end* the life of the one it was aimed to. It had, remembering Slughorn's words, the nasty side effect of cutting up your own soul.

In my opinion, it wasn't the act of killing that caused a the soul to break, after all, everything thrives upon the death of something else. Taller trees absorb more sunlight and kill the buds of new ones, plants grow out of organic compounds in the ground which were the results of decay, animals ate either plants or other beasts. The death of not-youreself was the cornerstone of your life.

The Killing Curse however killed for the sake of killing, not because of necessity, not to defend a territory or hunt dinner. That behaviour was in contrast with 'nature', as Slugorn had called it in the books, it caused a rift in the caster, which was the effect of deliberately acting against the natural course of the world. In my mind, its side effects were similar to the results of a botched up ritual. As fake-Moody had explained, or at least, as what I managed to unfurl from his near worship of the Unforgivables, the hate necessary to power an AK had to be without reserves, it had to fill everything you were capable of thinking and feeling, in the same way one needed happiness without any spark of fear to summon a Patronus.

As I had learned years before, rituals are a not-adaptable form of temporary magic enanchement. With peculiar ingredients and exact runes that linked them to you in a specific pattern, you attempted to channel into youreself a silver of the world-soul, directing it into youreself with a single purpose.

Killing without purpose, as the sheer quality of the hate imposed, meant having world-soul in conflict with youreself. That kind of hate was all consuming, the only reason you existed (while casting the Killing Curse) was to kill the one on the other side of your wand.

Using rituals, you were a fish trying to coerce sea currents to aid you through *squiggles and herbs or animal parts on the fucking sand*. And killing without purpose meant going against said sea currents. Any child has at some point killed an isect only because he could. Or ripped away a flower, or performed some random act of free cruelty that ended up causing the death of an innocent bug, ant, or plant. Why children grew up without their souls splintered? Like always, the answer was intent or understanding. Children don't understand what

death is, and as such their intent can't be directed towards ending life.

I didn't know what kind of shit Lily Potter pulled to save her son. But souls were clearly an important part of whatever had happened. In Tom's head, killing the child made perfect sense, but he didn't *actually* consider him a treath. Why should he? So, Voldemort that night wasn't fighting for survival, but killing willy nilly. At the same time, Lily Potter, far from being the only mother to ever die for her child, cooked up some ritual that clearly had among its components her 'not-fighting-back'. I knew that specific actions could be part of a ritual, after all, to learn Parseltongue I had acted in a very specific manner.

Back on the study of souls.

The purpose of my session of research deep in Wonderland was realizing sentient wards. Learning a stable and reliable wsy to do it in the process.

The snag: how to manipulate other people's souls without making a mess of my own soul.

Why not using a kneazle or a House Elf' souls? Frankly, I preferred potentially maiming the souls of killers and rapists, but the other reason was that being human myself, it would likely be easier to manipulate another human soul.

My fingers dug into the folds of my coat and brought out a little stone box, placing it on the wooden table in front of me, opening with a flick of the wirst. Inside, a little, cracked, black stone glinted ominously, as if it was daring me to uncover its secrets.

Souls were strange things. A reflection of an identity, an embodiement of all the events that shaped said identity, and a somewhat separated shard of a greater whole.

Interaction with reality are our personal history, our thoughts and beliefs are crafted with roots in said events, but ultimately can travel far from everything you have ever experienced. Who we are is a direct answer to what the world around us is. The 'real' one, made of roads, trees, buildings, other people and flesh; along with the 'virtual' one, made of dreams, hopes, fears, thoughts, beliefs.

Death was a condition of existence. When our time came, our bodies collapsing and surrendering to mortality, our souls return to be a part of a bigger entity, since they're tied without hope to be freed to our physical representation. Any sign we've left on the world keeps existing through either physical constructs, for example a statue we carved, and through the impact we've had on other people. The latter is a far more accurate memory of us, because how could a statue understand its maker by the feel of his hands during its creation?

The Resurrection Stone, when turned three times, pressed its amorphous self against your soul, finding the empty impressions of those that no longer fill them, and gave appearance to those empty furrows. To be is to be perceived, and so to know thyself is only possible through the eyes of the other. The nature of our immortal lives is in the consequences of our words and deeds, that go on and are pushing themselves throughout all time. Our lives are not our own. From womb to tomb, we are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future. If my soul was water, my history (and among the events that shaped me there would be also the presence of other people) would be the canteen that contains it.

The Stone created, or better yet, allowed our own soul to 'materialize' the dead close to us. It allowed our soul to 'fill the gaps' so to speak.

The Dementors devour souls, I didn't know if they dismembered what they ate before scattering it again across the world-soul, but they searched and ate humans based on their fear of death. Fear of death is a biological imperative, unavoidable, it's a result of

evolution, its the counterpart of the first commandment each living being' instinct answer to: Survive. Survive means not die, not dying means do everything in your power to avoid lethal situations, or if unavoidable, do everything to overcome the treath to your life.

From what little I could divine, and among the clues there was their distinctly human shape, Dementors were clearly a human creation. Or at least they had spawned from some crazy magic a witch or wizard had performed. Maybe, given the shared weakness to tge Patronus, they were related with Lethifolds. That was why they hunted human souls. Maybe it was because they felt that with enough souls they could manage to regain their humanity, maybe they were simply bored. I didn't know, and it didn't matter, not really. They clearly perceived living beings from their fear, but given how tgey were able to navigate the world (one had opened a carriage's compartment at the beginning of The Prisoner of Azkaban) they also had another set of senses, a less otherworldly one.

Why did the dementors not only ignore Harry Potter, but reacted to the shades brought back by the Stone like they were Patroni?

My tentative answer was because during his last stroll in the Forbidden Forest, Harry Potter was an impossibility to their senses. They could perceive a human and a will that fully understood that he was about to die, a soul that recognized its primary instinct, and a fear that was so utterly powerless to even make him waver. So, given their lack of experience with the phenomenon, or better yet, the sheer impossibility they witnessed, made the dementors recoil.

Why hopeful suicides didn't have the same effect on Dementors? Likely more than one prisoner of Azaban wished nothing more than to die at some point or another during his stay on the dreaded island.

Again, intent assumed an important role in the course of events. Desperation, fear of further suffering, tiredness, many things could lead someone to take his life, or at least to wish for death.

That was not what ruled Potter's mind in the books. Rather, the snitch opened 'at the end'. And the purpose of Harry Potter was to end the conflict, it overruled an instinct which was still very much awake and active in the young man's mind. He wasn't even thinking about the effects of his self sacrifice, only about the *end*.

If the stone only used our experience to create the shades or its enchantment was able to actually shape again the souls of the dead close to our hearts I couldn't know, since I really had nobody to check.

What the stone *did* was pretty straightforward, was it *was*... it was different from anything else I've ever experienced. I did manage to turn Fyendfire into a kind of alloy, I did manage to forge a crystal butterfly around my Patronus, so I wasn't a novice when it came to crafting. The small black stone, was made of something I couldn't define. Harder than diamond, lighter than it should be, it captured and refracted light in a way I couldn't justify with physics.

Maybe studying the Cloak I can figure it out. I mused to myself. For the time being, I suspected it was simply the anchor of the magic that made it work. And more than that, I believed the magic itself had created the stone.

When the moment for the experiment came, I cleared up an area from twigs and whatnot in front of the hut where I had spent an undetermined amount of time researching, and dragged out one of the two men I had previously captured.

My wand moved languidly in my hand, a circle of blue fire surrounding the man, an hollow, one inch tall dodecahedron made of gold, and the Stone; while I walked around it, writing down runes as I went.

Hagalaz: hailstorm, destruction, change, loss. I would violently rip away his soul, bending it to a purpose different from what the will of its actual holder could fathom.

Mannaz, which stood for self, friendship and mankind, but upside down, so that it meant suicide, manipulation and mortality. His soul would be mine to manipulate.

Raido, which stood for journey, and Raido upside down, which instead stood for injustice and death. While he would be completing a journey, it would end with a death he couldn't hope to oppose, robbing him of the just right to defend himself.

Algiz, which would give the purpose to the soul after its holder's death, it meant protection.

Fehu, written like the reflection in a mirror, so that it stood for travel, relocation, dance of life. It bound together the previous five runes, bringing the total to a stable six, which was twice the number of elements inside of the circle and half the number of faces on the dodecahedron.

When I was ready, I took a deep breath, and each rune glowed of a brilliant golden, shining omniously among my trees.

Creation placed uncommon effects upon the crafted object. Vaguely, its soul remembered the voice that birthed it, and tended to answer much more readily to it. We were in Wonderland, a place with a loud voice, and I made it. So, the ritual was meant to ensure a conflict between me and the captive's soul, and I was sure that my soul-voice could overcome his.

With the experience that came with years of occlumency and meditation, I started regulating my breath as to not disrupt the flames that shone brightly in the otherwise dark clearing. I was in the Dusk region of Wonderland, but it was dark, heavy clouds hiding the sky I had created from view. The silence around me was heavy and thick, from time to time disrupted by a sound caused by this or that animal, which knew better than to challenge what to them appeared as the absolute apex predator of the world, didn't the basilisk himself answer to me after all?

I breathed slowly, erasing the presence of the occasional goosebumps on my skin, ignoring the light rustling of my clothes against my moving chest, perceiving and discarding the almost inaudible breeze and smells that came with it.

Soon, everything outside of the absence of action and empty void that was my mind ceased to exist, leaving only myself.

I felt almost cold in the beginning, but slowly, my bodily sense stopped perceiving, there was only the silence and the flames of the ritual, the slow breath of the unconscious prisoner, the shifting magic of the Stone, the waiting trap of the dodecahedron. I close closed my eyes, letting the surrounding darkness swallow me.

Even more slowly, my thoughts about the purpose of my meditation faded into the background of my mind, my general worries and ambitions no longer existed. Along with those thoughts, time stopped having any significance.

When my entire being was floating in nothing, my senses slowly falling asleep, I turned my attention inwards, and with a last thump, my heart stopped beating.

I opened my eyes and observed the reality around me, I saw and I was, and what I perceived couldn't be forgotten nor described, for the words to capture the experience didn't exist yet.

I reached outward, not with my will, mind, magic or intent, since none of the parts that made me existed on their own. I simply was, and with my whole being, I overflow from the cup that was my body until I perceived the circle that I had set up.

Heat like warm water started flowing through the runes, turning their golden light to white as the ritual made what it had been designed for. The Stone trembled in its position of the ground, and through it, I felt the nearest soul, its nooks and crannies, its edges and handles.

I didn't press myself against it, I didn't need to get to know it like I did with Voldemort's soul shard inside Rowena's diadem, I only needed to push it towards the hungry trap I had prepared.

The killing curse recided the link between soul and body, it was its only purpose and result.

I reached forward, and plucked the soul of my captive with little difficulty. My hand over his soul was the hope of his deepest dearms come true, the fear of his long forgotten nightmares coming to life if he didn't obey, it was the voice of his mother calling him home, and the cruel laugh of his little sister that told him how much she had always despised him. So his soul moved, away from the despair, and towards the safety of a home warmed with love. Away from his body, and into my waiting hand.

Now for the difficult part. I steeled myself, and Halagaz came to life, destroying the prisoner's body and leaving his soul to fall apart in my hand.

Without a body to hold it together, his soul returned to the world soul, unraveling, losing everything. Or at least it tried to.

Where before the soul was holden together by its body, now the Stone had crafted a white shape visible only to me for the soul to inhabit. It was *wrong* to the soul, that instinctively knew that after death it wasn't supposed to be standing in a forest.

The shade opened its mouth as to talk, but then the other runes turned white.

Mannaz reversed channeled manipulation, giving me leverage on the soul inside of the shape created by the Resurrection Stone.

Raido started the short travel towards its new container, while its mirrored counterpart robbed the soul of the chance to justly oppose me. The shade started falling on itself, becoming a single white strand that twirled towards its destination.

When the soul was about to touch the dodecahedron, Algiz lit up, imprinting its purpose.

Once the last strand of white disappeared in the dodecahedron, Fehu closed the process, the dance of life ending and beginning anew under a new form.

It was done. The flaming runes disappeared, while the circle of blue fire flashed with for an instant, before choosing to die down slowly.

At a sedated pace, I returned to the body I had never left, my heart keeping its steady rhythm. What meaning has time for a soul? For me, the process lasted hours, for my body, less than a single heartbeat.

I turned towards the innocent looking Stone and golden Dodecahedron, walking over and pocketing the first while holding the second carefully between my fingers: "Time for testing, my new friend." I said. *Listening* to it, I could only hear a placid reassurance, a determined defence.

20. WEAPONIZING KNOWLEDGE

WEAPONIZING KNOWLEDGE

"Apparently, letting the ones from Canon Potterverse handle this war isn't playing out well." I stated to myself.

"On the fly!" Quoth Raven. *Well, mostly to myself.*

Beyond the immediate applications of my most recent frat into the magic of the soul, and besides the fascinating theoretical concept and ideas it could introduce in the magic community worldwide, I was left with two options, since none of my plans to prepare the magical world for the failing of the Statute of Secrecy was ready: retire myself and my assets into Wonderland to wait out the incoming storm, hoping that Plot Armor would force the events once more to follow the extremely improbable plan of Albus Dumbledore, or I could enter the fray myself.

Now, I knew my limits: I was the one who understood magic better than anybody else on the planet, and capable of feats that common wizards and witches wouldn't even be capable of dreaming of, or at least I felt that way. Having said that, while my enchantments were truly masterpieces, my transmutations works of art, and my will overall quite spectacular, Tom Marvolo Riddle, our friendly neighbourly Dark Lord, was the peak of the school of magic I dubbed: "KILL IT! KILL IT HORRIBLY WITH PAIN AND ROT!" which left me in a position where an eventual duel wouldn't be an easy thing to win.

I wasn't a warrior, simple as that, against your common, or even against your better than average mage, I was pretty much untouchable, understanding and practice granted me as much: Voldemort was as far from the common wizard as I was, but where I could witness the dance of the stars in the void simply with a wave of my hand, or turn a tree into a living house, with all the magic that

there was between the two, the Dark Lord knew how to kill, maim, torture, terrorize, terrify, enslave, murder, etcetera etcetera.

Since the very beginning of my second lease at life in the Potter-Verse, my long term plan orbited around the idea of me staying alive. It sounds obvious, but I could imagine that a random person chunked in my position would be more than willing to join forces with the Chosen One to preserve all that was rightful and beautiful and butterflies and rainbows, even at the cost of his own life. I did not.

It was quite simple in the end: I wanted Voldemort busy enough to not threaten the Statute of Secrecy, or preferably dead, while I could carry on with my immortal life to understand and master everything (magic related) that I could. So, surrendering my ongoing projects and going into hiding was a viable option in my mind, albeit one that annoyed me greatly.

Removing dear old Tommy by myself would be extremely rewarding in both the short and long time. So, at the core of my motivation, there was a simple, undeniable concept: I was proud of what I was building and of what I was able to build, I wanted to keep going as I had been, but I couldn't because a freak succession of events turned Fleur into a living flame, and because if left unchecked Tom would also, sooner or later, cause disasters I couldn't simply fix.

Killing the dark lord it is. I thought tiredly as plans started to whirl in my head about how to gain for myself a secure win. I wanted to squash him, to be so beyond his reach that my victory would be not only the only possible outcome, but also easy, and possibly discreet enough to not tear asunder the Statute, since its preservation was one of the reasons behind my choice.

To win against Voldemort, I would do what mankind had always did when confronted with a beast clearly superior in the art of killing: build some weapon that would allow me to strike either more previous wounds, like a spear used against wolves instead of bare hands, or that would keep me in a position where said beast couldn't retaliate, like bow and arrows. Now, since both I and Tom had

access to magic, (sadly), and a pretty deep connection given the kind of bullshit Tom had been able to pull in the books, so a ward to smother his ability to affect changes of reality through simple will would be unlikely to work, if only because of his having his soul shredded and tossed around would more than likely not allow me to isolate him completely from his other parts, and thusly the World-Soul.

So, a weapon to wound grievously, without hope of recovery. I started to list in my head, my hand lazily twirling the spruce wand. *Something that can't be used against me.* I added, noting how ironic would be building a magical weapon only for Voldemort to use it. "So... something to wound him no matter what he has done to protect himself... something that interacts openly with his soul..." and as I spoke, I could imagine what kind of side effects wielding such a tool would impose on my own soul: after all, steeping myself in the intent of destroying souls, or at least tearing them to the point that they were no longer recognizable, would be quite detrimental.

As I had discovered years before, constant use of magic with the only purpose of destruction would at some point turn my mind into something capable mostly of doing harm, damaging the neutral state of mind I intended to keep. And yet, I needed such a weapon tied to my very self, since I couldn't conceive the idea of it being available to anybody else.

"Perhaps I can cheat." I mused, thinking of all the ways through which I created something by all rights impossible: "Not a weapon, but a tool to interact with the World-Soul on a deeper level than Tom Riddle. *Something that would grant my will something akin to 'Superior Hierarchy' over Tom's will...* I would create an instrument that would allow me to truly act upon the soul, through the World-Voice itself, a ritual of sorts, tied to the tool I was going to build... Yes. I thought, as possible ways to follow this latest bout of unadulterated genius started to take root in my mind.

But in which form? I briefly paused, pondering about the materials that I would need to actually build such a conduit to the World-Soul.

The form should follow the function, and yet the form symbolizes the 'Truth' of the function, one cannot be without the other.

I'll need something... truly extraordinary. And the ritual that started taking form into my head was shattering itself and recomposing in patterns that I found less fixated in details, but that would allow me a greater range to apport modifications on the fly that could potentially save me. I needed to access the conceptual realm from where I had previously manipulated the souls of the two rapists I had kidnapped, and from there expand the "depth" of my grasp upon it.

Sadly, that had been the point where Fleur had unravelled, losing herself amongst the flows of the World-Soul. I needed to force myself to return to being myself immediately after I completed the building-forging-crafting of the Soul-Channel.

For that, I would need some kind of leverage upon my own soul, something that could reach me through every level of being, something so uniquely mine and yet so deeply rooted into the shards that made my core that could not be denied by myself, consciously or unconsciously, even though whatever means and superior understanding I would conquer during the crafting of what was likely to become the permanent avatar of the World-Soul, directed and shaped by my own intent.

Every living being is based upon a single instinct: to live. The simplest being, nothing more than warm water and little stuff inside a capsule of lipid of some kind, reacted positively to everything not-nocive, and run away (as best as it could) from all that was nocive, the second reaction, nothing more than a chemical reaction in monocellular beings, evolved with time into what more complex beings would recognize as "flee-or-fight" reaction: all based on another chemical reaction, which released the full width of that first instinct, the one at the core of living. The primal push, the undeniable pull: "survive".

So, when confronted with a possible nocive situation, a living being reacts following the pattern of fleeing or fighting in answer to a

single, universal signal: pain.

I had a lot of thinking to do, a lot of simulations to run, and a lot of luck to collect.

Finding a certified professional willing to sell Felix Felicis had been a nightmare and half since clearly, it was a restricted potion that no government wanted available to the masses, but through the admittedly few friends I made among the people interested in reshaping the world through Great Works of Magic, I had managed it. For quite the exorbitant price, I had a vial that would grant me seven hours of luck. Not that I would need it, but I would take every possible help, after all, the ritual/procedure/plan I was going to follow would leverage an everything I was and held a minor probability of failing catastrophically and killing me horribly.

My wand was going to be a focus, the cornerstone of not a weapon, but of the staff/tool/channel-for-the-soul that was going to accompany me for the rest of my immortal life, but it would need the ability to change and adapt. The final form of my masterpiece would end up being a cross between a sceptre and a spear, symbolizing my 'Authority' over the World-Soul, that in the great scheme of things would turn my will into a simple pebble capable of deviating the flow of the World-Soul's flow.

Why not a crown or a ring? Because I needed a tool through which direct the events, through which I could *Enforce* the changes I willed upon reality itself, something that I could point at a target, granting me the focus I would otherwise lack.

I cut my wrists at the edge of a vast basin of stone that I had dug out of the deepest past of Wonderland, it had been drowned in my magic, my will, and would be the "birthing chamber" of the Soul-Channel. With a careful application of the Elixir of Life, I kept bleeding, imposing my will to make the red liquid flow faster than it should. After three hours, I had filled the basin I would be working with. Blood was fundamental, since, for the weapon to be able to

grow with me, it had to become alive. At least in the same way Runes used to be alive before growing quiescent.

I laid my wand inside the blood, and three straight branches of wood found their way into the viscous mix. I couldn't see beneath the blood that I was stopping from coagulating, but I didn't need to. On each one of the unpruned 2 meters tall branches, there were written the 28 Elder Futhark Runes, and they called to each other orienting the wood like I hoped. Without wasting time, my free hand rose to my face, and with a squelching sound, the spherical philosopher stone left my eye socket in order to be placed at the base of my wand. Like the Old Tjikko it came from, and encouraged by my will, the wood from the handle cracked and split, sprouting roots that encased the red stone before they went on and met each of the branches I had submerged in my blood.

The first branch had been taken from the same Spruce tree my wand was born from, the second one had belonged to the Desert Ironwood tree I had snatched from Arizona, and the last had been more recently acquired from the tallest Redwood tree that had grown in Wonderland.

The stone sword I had fashioned myself for my battle against the sphinx soon found its way into the blood, the branches climbing over it and breaking apart the handle, recognizing it along with the cross handguard' purposes as meaningless for the direction I wanted the soul-channel to grow.

With a twitch of will, the vial of Felix Felicis levitated towards me, and I took a single, short sip before letting the seven remaining drops fall into the basin.

"Luck" was a subjective term, and the extremely complex potion managed to grant a limited form of precognition on the user, who subconsciously picked the Path which held the better results for the "self". I doubted that wizards truly understood what that had managed to craft, but then again, it wouldn't be the first time. At the end of the day the innocent-looking potion took the connection the

drinker had with the "time" silver of the world soul, and settled on the "brightest" pattern it could find in the immediate future. Greater doses had obviously a multiplying effect, since the drinker in the said path had access to that 'sixth sense' that would undoubtedly lead him to the best of results.

When I felt the direction the potion was pushing me towards, it didn't manifest as the "instinct" that had lead Harry Potter in the Half-Blood Prince, I was far too aware of my "self" for it to be the case, but surely I could pick up better on that sixth sense that had allowed me to create Raven as she was, on that instinct that led every living being capable of complex thought processes to secure the safety of the "self". Survival is deeply rooted in the biological heritage of every living being, and for a single moment, I consciously applied said instinct.

The cavemen had warded viciously their caverns, viruses existed only in two states: one to search recognize the conditions of the surrounding environment, and one that was the one they were in when said conditions were met. So, when my instinct told me to add the Resurrection Stone to the sone blade that already was being turned into something *more*, taking Iron from the blood in the basin, hardening and changing in manners that followed flows of souls' whispers I couldn't truly perceive, I understood how to go about it, and the following path that such a modification would require to become the best it could.

The same distinct that had led me to add the Resurrection Stone blazed in alarm then, and I realized that if I didn't manage to complete my creation in less than a few minutes, I would be too drained to survive: my blood had kept flowing for hours, while my own soul was stretched thin all over the metaphysical place, coaxing together the strands that didn't wish to belong with those that simply worked as a weight to avoid being blown away from the metaphorical current of the flow of the World-Soul's flow.

Slowly, but still as quick as I could, I plunged once more into myself, my awareness never leaving the area, my "self" pressed and

intertwined together with my creation, not leaving me any other choice but to go forward or simply surrendering to the flow and dying.

And it was vast, beyond the scope of the understanding that a mortal soul should have been capable of, and there, the loophole I found saved the day: I didn't need to understand the flow of the Universe-Soul, I could not, no more than a goldfish in a pond could understand the idea of quantum foam having fins as its only tool.

Yet, the fish could swim in said pond, and every wizard had been able to change the world following the effects of rules created as a side effect of the Forces at the origins of reality itself. So I ignored the multiple, multiplying, infinite and everchanging threads spinning around me, taunting me, promising to be understood if only I were to follow a single one.

But very much like it had happened when I had learned parseltongue, I forced myself to clamp down on myself, denying everything that wasn't compatible with the Eternal Flame of my true "self". And still, the usually plain world that I could see when threading the realm of souls (read: metaphysical plane where I could witness the World-Soul in its overbearing vastness and complexity) rippled, turning from a vast tapestry that extended beyond me and with mechanics and colours and twists and nooks and whys into an ever-shifting desert. Yet the dunes that moved as waves without following any rhythm I could discern were composed by grains of multicoloured sand, each shining as the only Truth possible amongst the falsehoods, which were perhaps even more convincing as reality folded itself around knots I could somehow see as I was far away despite being one of such grains myself.

The "instinct" of survival, the "sixth sense" for the better decision possible, enhanced to beyond what was possible by the Felix Felicis, the same one I applied to my almost completely living creation in tandem with myself, *burned*. Its own nature contrasting with the impossibly wide array of possibilities and impossibilities shifting around me, and as pain is the same instinct every last amoeba

associates with the beginning of not-being, my being refused the Evershifting Desert.

An existential pain vaster than what mere words could express washed over me, all-encompassing, sharp and gargantuan, oceanic and searing. The grain of sand that I was/had-been/never-will-be shattered into a lower level of existence, and I found my self torn amongst the flowing threads, each an idea, each a river intersecting countless others.

And I was a falling leaf, I was the vibrant green that stole a smile with its brightness, I was a resounding echo, I was a memory, I was shade and rock, wood and wind, chalk and sadness, moon and rage. I was greed and shattered, tall and aflame, swinging and steam.

Again, *pain*.

Once more, the level of awareness that I was roaming through started to adjust, becoming brittle as my connection to the place was disturbed by the painful effects of the Felix Felicis interacting with the endless possibilities to the 'perfect path' that was open to me.

As I fell behind and within, my metaphorical eyes started to lose sight of the threads around me, I recognized the three passive woods that were the branches out of which I had crafted my spear, the flowing umbilical cord that was my wand, the spark within, the silver of future shaped around it, the constant conversion between heat and kinetic energy twirling at its base, the blood drinking stone blade that had swallowed the Resurrection Stone being held at the top, three tendrils of gray stone that flowed like hairs along the spear that was taking form.

And in my heightened awareness, I could see and understand each of the components, and I saw and understood that they were merely that: components, the spear formed in the blood lacked identity, even with my blood flowing through and within it. It was a collection of powerful components, even on the verge of being alive ones, but I needed them to be One.

And so, Intent shaped reality once more, the branches had belonged to different trees in different parts of the world. But every tree breathed the same air, was rooted in the same earth, had been chosen by the same hand. The philosopher's Stone fell within the other components without any need on my part of encouraging the process, matter had always been nothing more than frozen energy, and what had been the heat of the sun had become a swirling wind. What had been my wand I perceived only as a connection to the World-Soul, and it was bridge and tool through which the distance between me and change could be crossed. It had once been a separate piece of wood, a single thunderbird's feather, and a single demiguise's eyestrings. It had been coaxed into becoming one, but I had always been able to pick up on the nuances of the small differences among its components. The wood of the wand immediately recognized the branch that came from the same tree, and the connection was forged immediately, like a single flower transplanted into a different plot of land. But the branch from the Old Tjikko had already been made One with the other two, and so, the only elements that lacked [UNITY] with the rest of my masterpiece were the cores of the wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Stone Blade that had once been the most important part of a sword.

My intent travelled through the tethers that made reality, it sung to the soul of rock and wood, it coaxed the silver of future that got reflected in the demiguise's eyestrings and echoed the rumbling of thunder, slowly, or in just a single instant, like a glacier melting or a knot coming undone, my wand became part of the One. Without stopping to marvel at my accomplishment, I pushed forward, the Stone Blade remembering my touch, the battles faced together and the purpose had instilled into it originally. To cut and never break, to tear through protection and to drink the blood of those that felled.

Like it was liquid, the stone blurred in an amorphous shape, it was mercurial and yet didn't surrender an inch of its sturdiness. The runes I had inscribed into it became alive once more, with me renewing their purpose and confirming it for the times yet to come. The first to briefly shine golden against the grey of the stone was

URUZ, which represented a Bull. It was *Strength, Tenacity, Courage, Untamed Potential, Freedom*. On the opposite side of the blade, mirroring the first, came THURISAZ, which represented a Thorn. It was *Reaction, Defense, Conflict, Catharsis, Regeneration*. At the middle of its height, again on the opposite sides of the blade, there was RAIDO, representing a Wagon. It was *Travel, Rhythm, Spontaneity, Evolution, Decisions*. To give a direction to the travel had been etched KENNAZ: which represented a Torch. It was *Vision, Creativity, Inspiration, Improvement, Vitality*. While at the end of the blade, completing the chain of runes that imprinted my intent against the sphinx in the stone back during the Triwizard, there were EIHWAZ and Halagaz. The first represented a Yew Tree, symbolizing *Balance, Enlightenment, Death, The World Tree*. While the latter stood for Hail. It symbolized *Nature, Wrath, Being Tested, Overcoming Obstacles*.

As each of the runes was renewed and tied its meaning to the purpose of the blade, the runes etched onto the three branches that once were not-One flashed as an echo, their purpose recalling connections through the shaft of the spear and restoring the balance, giving form to the shapeless channel to the World-soul, giving it width, freedom and depth, so that I could direct the change not limited by the purposes etched on the blade.

As the stone blade flowed in the shaft of the spear, reforming at its top in an almond-like shape, the Resurrection stone remained unchanged at its base, dead to the senses of men. And yet, while my sight was flagging and my strength waning, as who I was collapsed on itself to seek refuge from the too much awareness, my soul found the purpose of the Resurrection Stone. With a final ripple of Change that would have escaped any men, my shape took form through the stone, and the One, which was the identity of what I had shaped my masterpiece to be, filled it.

My heightened perception of a higher state of awareness crumbled with my strength, and I fell into the basin, no empty of blood, where the result of my work began to *Live*.

And it was there, like having a second heartbeat, a second set of senses, only that instead of being smell, touch, hearing and eyesight, it was sensing that went deeper, echoing constantly, almost but not quite like a sonar that made it possible for me to witness the connection between what was around me and the World-Soul.

With a faint smile that I couldn't avoid sporting, I felt the effects of the Philosopher Stone kicking in inside the spear, running along my veins as there was no difference between its being and mine. It was an extension of my self, instead of sinew bones and ligaments to keep us together, there was only my soul, within and around the both of us, acting as nerves and skin, marrow and thought.

Without even realizing it, I fell into unconsciousness.

I awakened only to recognize the dissonance echoing through my senses, while my eyes couldn't pick up on any presence in the air around me, I knew that the air itself was connected with me, it knew me as the creator of Wonderland, and it answered to my thoughts without a truly conscious input on my part.

I eyed critically the spear in my hands, rolling it between my fingers and testing its weight, before actually trying to do magic with it. As I willed it, a tree at the edge of the clearing turned into a seven meters long snake, which immediately looked around confused for the sudden change, before being returned to its original form with a negligent flex of my thoughts.

In the end, my masterpiece had become an eight feet tall spear, with a dark grey almond-shaped blade at the top, the wood of the shaft was like gnarled roots around of its base, and the dark gleam of the Resurrection Stone made itself known from time to time between the vines of wood. The shaft itself looked like an intertwined sequence of the three branches, each wood with its own colouration, with runes that could be faintly seen if I angled the One in the correct way under the artificial moonlight of Wonderland. At the bottom of the spear, the same stone that made the tip formed a flat end, and I could feel the

filaments of impossibly strong stone running inside the shaft, like they were made of hair. Equally distributed along the shaft, I could feel the 'heartbeat' of the Philosopher Stone, which had apparently remained in a liquid state even after the completion of the ritual.

Even so, to my new Sense of What Was and Could Be, the spear was a single being, and I knew that it was me.

The name of my creation rose to my lips without my consent, following few words to introduce it: "Gorr van ríkr fjölkyngi, Saðr Fróðleikr!". The sounds came freely out of my mouth, Ancient Norse echoing in the small clearing as runes on the wood gleamed of golden light. And while I spoke those words, the meaning resonated in my mind without leaving a single strand of doubt regarding the success or failure of my ritual. Those words meant: *Made of magnificent sorcery, True Knowledge*. And considering the processes that went into its creation, and what it allowed me to do, it was appropriate.

Besides, the last part of its name meant also Lore and Magic. The meaning of what I had just said was clear in my mind, words in Old Norse that fell through my lips like I had spoken them thousands of times before.

Inside of Wonderland, I laughed as I felt the threads that were the Souls of everything around me twirl and breathe and sing just beyond the corner of my eye.

This war has already ended. I thought, and I knew that I was something beyond the common or extraordinary wizard alike. If Voldemort and Dumbledore had been bonfires to the candles that were Filius and Minerva, I was akin to a neutron star.

AN

I know that everybody was expecting an epic last stand against Voldemort, with important declarations and whatnot. For those

people, let me remind you that the MC is a SI who has dedicated his whole life to be able to say 'fuck you' to reality. He is a common human chunked into a muggleborn baby body, is someone that had difficulties into considering real anything but the magic that set this life of his apart from the one he lived before.

So, the reasons for which he didn't simply choose to retire from the world and do his own thing was that he had projects all around that he didn't wish to interrupt in case the Statute got broken with Voldemort wildly butchering humans all around.

As for the method... if I could or had any intention of publishing this book, I would have been forced to put an adequate final battle here, but this is fanfiction, so there are literally no expectations to be respected, no fans that I have to respect the dreams of.

Besides, going for a duel against Voldemort simply isn't the MC style. He acted as he did in the Ministry because he believes in respecting his duties, because the only thing that has kept him relatively sane in his otherwise crippling loneliness and lack of human interaction had been his dedication to a purpose, and said purpose had been learning magic.

Learning Occlumency at the cost of looking like the resident looney? he did it.

Giving up an eye in order to not mess up whatever the ritual to bring Raven into her on had cost? he accepted it.

Wasting precious time with coaching Fleur in order to observe how she took to magic and thusly having a wall against which bounce some of his ideas? He did it.

Having access to the professors' library in Hogwarts at the cost of teaching to the best of his ability and protect his students? he fucking did it.

So when he has to go on an LSD-like trip that threatens his own soul in order to gain access to what is basically a Trump Card against any other wizard? He took precautions and formulated an exact plan that nonetheless allowed for improvisation following the hunches he got from the Felix Felicis. Not only that, but he reconducted the workings of said potion to his Greater Theory of Magic, which is all-encompassing of what happened into the books.

So, we're getting closer and closer to the end gents, I hope that despite the subjective POV I managed to convey effectively how the MC applied the Magical Theory that I've been building up to this point.

21. An Anticlimatic End

AN ANTICLIMATIC END

Once that I was done giving birth to what was, under every point of view, a living conduit for my soul to the World-Soul, I only had to familiarize myself a bit with the tangible effects my thoughts had upon the strands of reality while I held True Knowledge in my hands.

In any case, the only remaining point to address before being actually able to put down Voldemort once for all, was the prophecy itself. And like I had done for every magical obstacle, topic, or challenge that I met in this life, I dedicated my considerable experience and understanding of the world to unravel the mystery that was the concept of 'prophecy'.

At its base, either a prophecy was false, and thusly below my radar, or it was true, and so deserving an appropriate understanding.

Time, like I had proven with altering its flow both in the last chamber of my Iron Trunk and in Wonderland, wasn't set in stone, and more than that, it wasn't linear, nor truly explainable with only mathematics.

Time however, intended as the very concept embodying a succession of changes, was a part of the World -Soul, or better yet, the World-Soul existed as a succession of states that one could see as beads on a string. Said beads, which represented the infinitesimal changes of each finite event that took part in the flow of what could be called 'History', were sometimes clustered together, sometimes separated one from another by a long section of the string.

Sometimes the string was twisted on itself, sometimes it hung loosely, describing a U of sorts that brought beads of events close one to another even without being close on the string itself.

That was because some events, or succession of events, held a 'weight', they held within themselves an important chance of affecting the Whole of the Events that defined the World-Soul. Thusly, always following the metaphor of beads on a string, extremely relevant cluster of events weighted down on the string, causing a dip on an otherwise straight string.

Sibil, back when she uttered the prophecy, and like every other true prophet before her, belonged to a succession of events, or a cluster of beads, which ended up being near the series of events that she spoke of in her prophecy.

Clearly, the sensibility of the prophets to the flows of the World-Soul was such that an important change echoed through the distance between the beads representing said Events.

It works well enough for me. With a shrug, I accepted my theory as sound. I wasn't like there was a better one to rely upon in any case.

2000 June 24

Time had become wobbly during my research frenzy, but with my spear ready, I knew that a better moment to properly attack Voldemort would never come. I had long known that despite my, frankly outstanding, understanding of and connection to the World-Soul, I wasn't a fighter. Not at my core. Sure, I enjoyed proving myself capable of this and that, and fighting, either against the Sphinx or the Dragon, allowed me to learn a lot and to stress my abilities in unexpected directions.

With a thunderous crack, I apparated again at the edges of Hogwarts boundaries, sending out a flare of light and waiting for a good half an hour before the barrage of spells designed to identify me failed again and again until the ones in charge managed to realize that poking out their noses to look would be much faster and effective.

The Trio themselves were walking toward me from Hogwart's gates, wands prudently ready to fire, and deep bags under their eyes. Once they had reached a reasonable distance from me, I let them start: "Prove that you're who you appear to be!" Weasley shouted.

I sighed, falling briefly into myself and bringing out *safeness-joy-strenght* from within, and when I slammed the bottom of my spear to the ground, a white shape coalesced out of thin air, my Albatross patronus flapped its far too large wings, dispelling itself once it had confirmed that there were no threats for him to face.

"It's him." Hermione confirmed, "Professor Flitwick told us a while ago, do you remember?"

The two males hesitantly lowered their wands: "You disappeared just before an enemy's raid, and appear again only now, it's awfully convenient is it not?" the redhead spoke slowly. Causing me to sigh exasperatedly. "I had to prepare." I shrugged raising the spear of a couple of inches, letting them now what I had been doing.

"And I still have to find a way to bring Fleur back, despite my study on the Soul..." I stopped myself from speaking further, it wasn't like they either cared or could actually understand what I had learned, or still yearned to learn.

Without waiting for more explanations, I plunged myself outside and beyond my [Self].

The world shifted and lurched, its colours and shapes falling apart and recombining in mind shattering concepts that had far too many and far too few dimensions to be properly perceived through human senses, [purpose]s and [shape]s becoming one another, shifting and churning in a veritable maelstrom of chaotic order that I couldn't escape...

A firm tug of myself on [Self] immediately anchored me and remembered me of [purpose].

In the material plane, I pointed True Knowledge at Harry Potter, and with a whisper of intent, reality twisted to accommodate me.

Inside the flowing rock at the core of my spear, an empty dodecahedron formed itself while runes lit themselves in golden light over the shaft.

Hagalaz: hailstorm, destruction, change, loss. I would violently rip away his soul, bending it to a purpose different from what the will of its actual holder could fathom.

Mannaz, which stood for self, friendship and mankind, but upside down, so that it meant suicide, manipulation, and mortality. His soul would be mine to manipulate.

Raido, which stood for journey, and Raido upside down, which instead stood for injustice and death. While he would be completing a journey, it would end with a death he couldn't hope to oppose, robbing him of the just right to defend himself.

Pertho, which would give the purpose to the soul after its holder's death, it meant pawn. I needed it as putty in my hands.

Fehu, written like the reflection in a mirror, so that it stood for travel, relocation, dance of life. It bound together with the previous five runes, bringing the total to a stable six, which was twice the number of elements inside of the circle and half the number of faces on the dodecahedron.

So, Harry Potter's soul left his body and came into a void section of my spear, carrying with itself the Voldemort's shard that Dumbledore had clearly failed to erase.

Before Either of my ex-students could realize what was going on, I willed [Self] in another material manifestation of the World-Soul, following an instinct more than a calculated expression of will, and I was gone.

Back home, deep inside of Wonderland, I had managed to isolate a hill that didn't follow the flow of time that characterized the area. The meadow that I had to grow around the hill was circular and covered in lush green grass, and was under one of the areas of Wonderland where the sky followed a regular cycle of Day and Night, allowing for a somewhat regular behaviour for the trees I had taken from all around the world and planted again in my home. There were seventeen trees from which I could craft wands, gently swaying in a circle at the top of the hill.

At some point or another, I had used the wood from each one to craft something, and I knew each nook and scratch of their barks, just as I knew how conductive of my will they would be.

The desert ironwood tree I was sitting under was about 10 meters high, and its trunk had a diameter of about 60cm. It wasn't in bloom, but that was not the interesting part. The bark was split open. The tree had been split in two, probably by a strike of lightning, and had kept growing. So from the roots of one single tree, two trunks were still very much alive, with leaves of a bluish-green. It was the three I had taken from Arizona after my meeting with the Thunderbird.

It's curious how much I resemble Odin. I mused by myself as I completed my preparations. I breathed slowly, erasing the presence of the occasional goosebumps on my skin, ignoring the light rustling of my clothes against my moving chest, perceiving and discarding the almost inaudible breeze and smells that came with it.

One day I would be able to act though the World-Soul without need for a stabilizing ritual, but I would need years of experience stil.

Soon, everything outside of the absence of action and empty void that was my mind ceased to exist, leaving only myself.

In that moment, I felt the sharp stab of pain between my ribs, recognizing the tip of Saðr Fróðleikr piercing me, eager for my soul and blood. And as I fell forward, the vines I had arranged tightened around my neck.

I felt almost cold in the beginning, but slowly, my bodily sense stopped perceiving, there was only the silence, and I closed my eyes, letting the surrounding darkness swallow me. Even more slowly, my thoughts about the purpose of my meditation faded into the background of my mind, my general worries and ambitions no longer existed. Along with those thoughts, time stopped having any significance.

When my entire being was floating in nothing, my senses slowly falling asleep, I turned my attention inwards, and with the last thump, my heart stopped beating. I opened my eyes and observed the reality around me, I saw and I was, and what I perceived couldn't be forgotten nor described, for the words to capture the experience didn't exist yet.

Instead of reaching outward, like I did to manipulate other souls, I kept going inwards. Not with my will, mind, magic or intent since none of the parts that made me existed on their own. I simply was, and with my whole being, I fell deep into myself, I felt every organ, every muscle, every electrical impulse running along my nerves. And yet I needed to go deeper.

At some point, I realized that the changes around me were always following a pattern, I had reached the level where what I was was an infinite collection of quirks, thoughts, likes, dislikes, instincts, memories, beliefs, sensations, dreams and fears. And the pattern created by the more or less swift circling of those countless details, I realized, was the 'song' of my soul. My identity. Me.

I was at the bottom of my soul, so to speak, near to the beginning of the two way connection that united me to the World-Soul. There where two thin threads that left the confusing amalgamation of thoughts and impressions that defied definition. One resonated with the warmth of my blood, of bones grinding and nerves flashing, the other... I followed it with a strong 'metaphysical hand' to hold the first tether, afraid of losing myself, and watched and didn't understand, and felt awed and afraid.

Before the senses of my soul, a liquid tapestry of concepts and ideas beyond my understanding, a galaxy of irregular geometrical shapes, a well at the bottom of which I could see *everything*, a song rushing through the blood that my soul did not possess, the crashing of thunder described as the gentle swaying of another thread. And the colors where at once empty and full, because the tapestry made of flowing colours was intersected by holes that were the fulcrum to hold it together. I strayed out of thought and time. I felt myself becoming a realm of stars, ending in white light, stars wheeled overhead, and every day was as long as the life age of the earth.

And yet, I could feel my body through a single string, a part of me that didn't allow itself to be discarded. I could feel my stilled heart and blood, I could remember the gentle swaying, and pressure on my neck.

Turning my attention to the twins held together in Saðr Fróðleikr, I acted.

Tom Marvolo Riddle had been many things during his life, orphan, child, intelligent, student, teacher (of sorts), revolutionary (not really), and most of all, wizard. In his mind, he had been a wizard since the first time something moved when he willed it. He had been more and the best since the first whisper of snakes.

He had been mistreated as a mudblood in his first years in Slytherin, but he had known, and he had persevered through the filth that was the rest of them. They who called themselves wizards, them who were nothing but sheep, waiting for someone who was their better to tell them what to do, to give purpose to their bland lives, to...

That and more I knew as my mind sifted through Voldemort's soul shard, before distractedly shaping what was the heavier and cleaner soul that was Harry Potter. I didn't look in detail at it, there was no need.

Resurrection Stone for the win. I thought with a grin, thinking about all the loopholes that I had to cross and find in order to manipulate

safely my first soul back wife Fleur was turning herself into [Fire].

I couldn't have acted on Voldemort's soul leveraging a single shard, the connection, with so many of his horcruxes already torn and broken, was less than paper thin. Luckily enough, I now had my hands over Harry Potter too. Now *his* connection to Voldemort was vast and basically indestructible. There were similarities that resonated through their souls, there was prophecy that tied them together, there was Lily's Sacrifice, which Voldemort had willed onto himself stealing Harry's blood, there were their multiple encounters...

I had all that was needed to act.

And so, Tom Marvolo Riddle, born the 31st December of 1926, and all of his manifestations across the World-Soul, unraveled like water spilling through the fingers that were the obsessions keeping him alive.

Distance did not, could not, matter in this instance.

I willed it, and so I scattered him across the Whole.

Without hesitation, Without remorse, Without any chance for him to fight back.

Some part of the real him likely felt it when I started the process, because I felt a twinge echoing in the shard that I held using Harry's soul as a glove to manipulate it.

Not a problem.

Through Saðr Fróðleikr I willed the vines that I was hung to to drop me while the spear's tip left my ribcage that immediately started healing.

Another brief instant of focus saw me return to the side of the soul I recognized belonged to Hermione Granger, who was at the side of a bed along with dozens of people despairing and shouting.

In the bed, under a blank sheet that covered him, rested the soulless body of Harry Potter.

As everyone freaked out, I pointed once more at his body with Saðr Fróðleikr, manipulating for one last time the soul of the Chosen One to make sure it would be safely tucked back into his owner's flesh.

"Voldemort is dead, clean up the rest." I said somberly and completely ignoring everyone. A flex of will later and I was already gone.

AN

I kind of wrote the epilogue a month ago, and I've been waiting for a proper 21st chapter to fall in my hands until now... needless to say I really wasn't feeling like writing it, but I brute-forced the process anyway.

In any case, in all of the books (and not only the HP ones) there is a lot of implied importance ascribed to the blood of a person (if one thinks about what polijuice can do with only hairs and what Dumbledore manages by shedding some blood on a rock), and I have expanded on that in this ff.

And like I have already explained, I see no need to nerf the MC at this point. He has access to the World-Soul itself, and has in his hands a part of Voldemort's soul: there is really no comparison.

With my other works going on, I have realized that this story was basically completed when the MC managed to completely harness the power of [change] through the creation of his spear. So this chapter is admittedly half-assed, and more for completion's sake than for any need on my part to write it.

That is why I have already published the next!

Yahoo!

22. Shaping The Future

AN

the stuff I talk about in this chapter is coherent with all of what I have explained before, and it will be another big ass Worldbuilding. During the whole story, I strictly respected the limit explained by canon, forging explanations for them that would leave me some wiggle room to branch out with new stuff. The last pair of chapters, besides closing the story proper, giving an end to Voldemort and setting up the break of the Statute, have been there only to remark the base from which I am building this stuff.

If it's been a long time since you've read this story, reading back the explanations on magic-souls-sacrifices-ritual will likely help you follow the reasoning behind the Magic in this chapter.

As I have always said, this whole ff has been written only to allow me a proper sandbox to play with magic, creating paradoxes that nevertheless don't go directly against the 'rules'. I had fun, and it's been my first story, so Yahooooo for finishing it, and thanks for the support, probably I'll start a series of one-shot crossovers, there is already one in my 'Plots and Oneshots' story on my profile.

If you enjoyed the worldbuilding and the lore, which are the selling points of this story, you'll likely like my other works, since in them I have kept the same 'respect the rules set in canon' premise, while exploring them and exploiting shamelessly every loophole to build up a coherent Lore.

In my other stories however, I've tried to build a relatable character, be it an SI, an OC, or an OOC, so someone not as robotic as David Taylor. In my other stories, the MC tends to be more involved with the main plot, and gets to interact with

characters present in canon, who I try to portray as the original were.

So, thank you all for your support up until now, and for keeping up with my LSD-worthy Pindaric flights around the concept and topic of magic.

I don't think I'll write another Harry Potter ff, sure as hell not before concluding Path of Knowledge, the one with an OOC Ron as the main character, even so, in that story I'm building the Lore around the concept of Magical Core, which is remarkably similar to how chakra works in Naruto, so I'm already halfway there, thanks to my Revolution ff.

Thank you all for your support and suggestions about magic, as well as the several PMs that have pointed out areas in which I have been less than perfectly understandable.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

February 14th 2003

In hindsight, limiting myself to kill Voldemort hadn't been my brightest idea.

Going on a rampage to end the reign of terror of the Dark Lord, Potter and Friends succeeded where the Death Eaters had failed (even if not for a lack of trying) and broke the Statute of Secrecy.

So, even if not particularly overjoyed by it, I had done it.

I had wrought storm and death, leaving pain and ashes in my wake, reminding to the world that yes, magic can be terrifying like the sun itself. Safer if seen from a distance. Surely, the continent breaking earthquakes and the random scattering of parts of the poles around the world had been proof enough that magic beings were better left alone.

Nothing says 'fuck you' to a muggle as a whole island carved out of an iceberg sitting in the middle of the Red Sea.

Muggles had pushed and pushed, like I knew they would, their elephantiac bureaucracies stalled those procedures that should have been quick as lightning while the opinion of the many prevailed over the wisdom of the few.

Of magical beings, muggles demanded to know everything wizardkind had ever known, and from witches and wizards themselves, the muggles all around the world had demanded a form of servitude. In many countries where magic-kind and muggles were forced to live together, a government composed by almost only muggles (since following the principles at the base of democracy the voice of many has to be represented by many persons), while the few wizards and witches, all muggleborns, that tried to cooperate with the change ended up as some kind of over-glorified paper pushers, giving freely secrets and information that weaponized the muggles on the side.

The secret accesses to the only magical quarters of the city had the first to be opened to the world, and through laws that enforced the market freedom against racial distinctions, muggle shops had been set up in magical districts.

Obviously, after the first months of curious convivence after the ICW accepted the complete collapse of the Statute of Secrecy as unrepairable, there had been a few years of cautious curiosity, then realizing that any half-trained wizard or witch would make the ultimate spy and special agent, the governments went all out trying to secure themselves the next generation of human-weapons.

Less than legal authorities started experimenting, some countries feigned ignorance, but still stood watching as human experimentation was conducted over wizard and witches too weak to defend themselves, that generally meant people 'suddenly disappearing'. It was almost like the beginning of another Blood War against Voldemort.

So I offered sanctuary to wizards and witches, Atlantis, which magic was beyond the grasp of almost everyone but me and the select few of the 'World Builders' like I had started referring to the group founded by me, Fleur, Flitwick, Nathan and Sam, and the world kept being ruined.

With the appearance of another world from under their nose and the realization that magic was real, the witch hunts started anew, even if under new guises. Wizardkind was accused of being greedy and not sharing our power with the rest of the world, muggles demanding with thundering voices healing and potions, while wizardkind' rights kept being restricted.

You need a permit for a wand.

You need a permit for each class of spells.

There is a tax involved.

You must swear an unbreakable vow to not breach the law.

And many more.

The tensions had bubbled over until the inevitable happened, and magic started to be feared, hated, and hunted.

I didn't play politics, I couldn't care less for the Blood War happening on my front door, I could care less about the whims and fleeting wills of the people living in the world. Earth did well before humans, it would do well after we somewhat managed to erase each other from the world.

And yet, while the wars moved from human to human never interested me, and I had only acted after Fleur went and got herself into the mess I couldn't save her from, I would dislike being the only spark of magic left on the world. Oh, even if wizardkind was to be exterminated, Magic wouldn't end, new muggleborns would rise with time, and one day another secret society of magic would be born.

But I disliked the idea that my world had to be condemned to a millennium of fear in dark corners and sideways alleys to stay still and allow people: be they well-meaning fools or greedy smart bastards, I still cared about magic before anything else. Some could say it was an empty existence, devoid of human contact, and it was, but I couldn't bring myself to care.

Like had happened often during my life inside a book that I knew was fiction, I shunted the creeping madness caused by that awareness into curiosity and my evergrowing obsession with all things magical. Perhaps there was a way to cause a permanent change... something to blur the lines between magical and not magical, to break apart the stone walls that defined what was 'possible'.

December 7th 2004

A four meters tall me walked across the forests of Wonderland, letting his mind flow through and around every being that he could perceive, from rock to river, from cloud to salamander, from grass to fire breathed by that annoying mutation of the chimaera...

I shook my head sharply. *No thinking in the third person.* I reprimanded myself as I returned my focus to my current project.

Fleur's failed attempt to become Fire, despite her great affinity and long weeks of experimenting, had been successful only halfway through, since the whole point was being able to turn back from the dip in the world-soul's shard that was the element you aimed to become. If her attempt taught me anything however, was that I needed something to anchor the sense of [Self] in order to not lose myself into the world-soul's shard.

With a tired sigh, I poured Fleur out of the glass jar where I had her stay. *I should stop calling her Fleur.* I reprimanded myself, I knew that while she 'sounded' similar to what the veela once was, her soul

and consciousness had long since lost themselves into the World-soul's shard of Fire.

The last attempt. I reminded myself while I eyed carefully the white and blue flames that quietly churned in the palm of my hand. I placed the fire in a small cup of stone, knowing that I had several minutes before it grew curious enough to jump out of it to look for something to consume. Not that she... *it*... I corrected myself again, needed anything beyond the oxygen it already consumed, but it was undeniable that fire didn't love being constrained.

Raido, the Norse rune for Travel, was the first to be inscribed in the ground by me manipulating Fleur's fire to burn it in the correct shape. Since the Fire lacked any actual will, I pressed the meaning of travel with my own understanding of it.

Peorð was the second one, which meant Uncertain, Hidden, Future, Secrets and Feminine. It was extremely appropriate since I was trying to send Fleur's soul into a body that she should be able to recreate at will.

With a white flash, the runes blurred out of existence, leaving me blinking for a few seconds before I managed to actually see: in the middle of the clearing, the blue and white fire was still placidly burning, but as I came closer to 'hear', I noted that it retained faint memory of Fleur, likely in the same way I retained a memory of Voldemort after having learned Parseltongue with my ritual, so many years before.

So, Fleur wasn't in the Fire anymore, or at least most of her wasn't. Looking around, it was clear that she hadn't reappeared anywhere near me. *Where did I cast her?* I had oped that an abrupt change would be enough for her to find her way back, but now that the fire she left behind 'sounded' even more alive, I had no clue as to where to look.

A week of pondering and deep thinking later

It was obvious, in retrospect: if Fleur isn't here, and chose to ignore the possible path I opened for her, either she has already come undone in the World-Soul, or she still exists there, without a way to come back here, since she doesn't have a body to hold her. Either way, I had exhausted every option I could think about to apply in order to bring her back. What I could do, I had already done, the rest was up to her, if there was still something that could be referred to as 'Fleur' in the World-Soul.

Abandoning with a tired sigh the failed project of bringing Fleur Back, I compartmentalized the delusion and twinge of hurt in order to be able to focus on the next project, one that I had been working on on and off for years: becoming [Lightning] (without ending up like Fleur).

True Knowledge already acted as an anchor for my soul, specifically giving me a landmark against which I could keep track of myself when roaming through the tethers that composed [Reality], but what I was looking for, and the imaginary and 'plan' that I had birthed so many years before, was something completely different: to change the [shape] of myself very much like I did when I turned in a fox, without losing any of [Self] to it.

Now, the animagus transformation at the end of the day was reasonably simple to obtain, Pettigrew was proof enough of it. Turning myself into Lightning, however, was extremely different.

A relatively simple animagus transformation simply changed the shape of wizard, allowing him to retain the thought complexity typical of a human. It was curious that an animagus could only be a full animal or fully human. There was no middle ground. Oh, sure, self-transfiguration was a thing, but no matter how much I tried, without the use of a wand for the connection to the world, I couldn't assume a fox's head over mine.

So, a focus for the transformation to happen. It had to be something along the lines of a trigger that enabled the change, and something that kept the ability under control once used, it had to be something

that kept the user from following Fleur's path, and something that your soul could 'tug' upon in order to turn back. I suspected that I needed to realize said focus with something to counteract it as part of the enchantment. *A totem of some kind?* But no, it would mean that the only place where the change was possible would be said totem.

Something that could always be with me once I finished it, something that would follow me in the change through lightning and be able to act as a focus for me to come back. I thought with a frown as I moved around Wonderland, the trees swaying gently out of my way in order to make my passage as smooth as possible.

"I need to craft some sort of hard override of the change, something that causes the transformation to unravel into the previous state..." I murmured as my free hand scratched my growing beard.

I walked slowly in the deep forests of Wonderland, my eyes trailing over the trees that I could feel on the back of my mind in the same way I was aware of where my feet were without need to look at them. It was only natural, I had been the one to pour himself so much into the creation of the hidden and evergrowing Being that was Wonderland after all.

With a sigh, I returned to think about my current project: it had to be something that worked to change the connection between the soul and the world soul. Becoming Lightning was easily done. Well, I could do it, but I would encounter Fleur's problem if I were to try without an anchor of some sort. My eyes then kept going over the world that I had created, and landed on the lake of saltwater that connected Wonderland to the English Channel

An organic solution then, likely based on the Elixir. It needed to affect the body deeply, and reach the soul. I needed a ritual to give meaning to the act of changing your soul. It couldn't be something as complex as injecting yourself with the organic compound, it needed to be... primal. Something that leveraged its effectiveness on one of the biological imperatives. Eating, which was at the base of the

simplest organism's thought pattern: eat what is good, avoid what it isn't.

The ritual would have to be inscribed in whatever organic vessel would host the change of the soul, that sounded like an elegant solution in my head.

An exchange of sorts needed to be inscribed in the ritual, made a part of it, I needed to define some sort of price to be paid, it didn't really matter what this price was, what was important, since I was dealing with changes not only in the physical manifestation of the soul, but with changing the soul itself, granting it another form of expression, in the current version of the project, I wanted a human soul to go from being expressible both as human-shape and Lightning-shape.

Undoubtedly, the soul-shattering pain that characterized an horcrux creation would translate in a pain related to the taste, since the ritual would be enabled through the act of eating. So, changing your soul would leave a rotten taste in your mouth. A single bite would be enough, since souls were not quantifiable, the act of accepting the change brought the silver of world-soul tethered to a specific element.

In another of my admittedly numerous strokes of genius, I planned the hard override of the change to be linked to the price paid, to the sacrifice that enabled the change. Accepting the transformation through the act of eating, would deny natural evolution, the stable path that everything had always followed. Not a simple act of eating however, the act needed to be something... more, more symbolic, more... something more deeply tied with the racial-memory of humans...

Eating a fruit. The answer came to me with a bright flash. From the nature of the fruits, which existed in order to be eaten and their seeds to be brought around by the eaters, that would expel them through their feces, to the biblical imaginary of eating the forbidden fruit. And in a way it was a pretty similar thing: the Fruit, upon which I

would inscribe and craft the Ritual of Soul-Change would be something that enabled a stark denial of the Natural Path of evolution. *Yes, Yes I could work with that!*

How to symbolize it? And by then I had reached the inside salt lake that connected Wonderland to the Channel, the water rippling in concentric circles from where my feet touched it.

After the stabilization of Earth, when waters could exist as a liquid, the presence of volcanoes and high geothermal energy warmed the water. In the water following the movements and flow of energies caused by the differences in temperature, random molecules that would one day be called lipids wound themselves together, forming spheres, isolating a part of said water from the rest.

That proto-molecule eventually started to be pierced by molecules that found themselves more stable inside of it.

Fast forward for several millennia, with the countless iterations of the creation of the proto-molecule, and evolution started in earnest.

All life came from the sea. I blinked.

"All life comes from the sea." I repeated out loud, feeling the heaviness of the statement on my lips.

Accepting a fundamental change to the [Self] was a refusal of the natural path of evolution, was an act of refusal, of detachment... a death of sorts. So, I found both my hard override over the potentially Soul-Shredding change of the [Self] and symbolic price to pay for the change.

"The [Sea] will hate those who take part in this ritual..." I nodded to myself, and seeing the water at my feet whip just that bit more wildly was a good enough confirmation.

Why stop to the elements? After all, everything had a soul, rocks, birds, iron... and more... there were concepts deeply tied to

mankind's imagination. Old gods still influenced us through their forgotten runes, and pieces of magic for those sensible enough to pick up on them still twisted and tweaked reality here and there.

Why only for humans souls? I asked myself, at the end of the day, every limited being that could be characterized by a [Self] could undergo the change, animals were not that different from humans, I knew that much, while I had proven that inanimate objects could assume a proto-personality of sorts. From the Talking Hat to Hogwarts to Griffindor' Sword, to my own Wonderland.

I had the idea, now I only had to balance the strand of [change] with [Lightning].

March 9th 2017

As I stood calmly over the waves, I thought about how far I had come, and how far I still could go. And like I had always done in order to deepen my understanding of Magic, I kept playing with the Project List, until, slowly but surely, the points on it became fewer and fewer: I was left with less than twenty projects, each beyond the wildest dreams of the craziest wizard to ever live. *Even if, in hindsight, perhaps that wizard is me.*

A complex ecosystem localized in bubbles at the bottom of the ocean could work, but I wasn't eager for manipulating time in order to allow it to grow fast enough for us to see any worthy change in the next couple of centuries. Even if the sub-water environment would naturally come to develop its own ecosystem, I didn't want it to exist only because of my spells.

Since I had truly grown into what I was, after wielding True Knowledge for the first time, I had come to realize that in a way I had limited myself: while before I could build enchantment upon enchantment until I obtained the result I wished, akin as the watchmakers of old managed put together countless gears to create something beyond them, while now I could simply channel reality to

accommodate my wishes, but I couldn't openly go against the flow of the World-Soul, that meant no slowly building up towards an end result.

I was still very much free to create what I wished, to shape and change reality towards a goal in my head, but said shape and change realized itself in a single, gargantuan twist that didn't rewrite the rules that I had spent a lifetime discovering, but that made use of them like a supercomputer could make use of the logical truth [not 1] == [0]. On one hand, I had an undeniable connection with the World-Soul, and I managed to hold onto my individuality thanks to the Anchor-Channel that was the spear True Knowledge, on the other, I understood the nuances like gravity in the same way an avalanche did, or in the same way the tides answered to the Moon's call.

"Why do you want it so isolated? Can't you make a bridge for air and light to travel through?" Sarah had questioned me when we went once more over the complex projects that at the time covered the desks around us.

"Because sooner or later whatever constructs not based on a living being collapses, the world-soul reclaims the souls without a true physical anchor, that is why ghosts are only imprints of the souls they once were, robbed from their will to live, and robbed from the opportunity of dying." I had answered blandly, seeing the solution truly present itself in the corners of my awareness.

The solution to making a form of magic last forever, I had found, was to make it alive, and set up a way for it to survive to the slow and inexorable march of time.

Plucking the concept of [City] and twisting it so that it could be accommodated with the bottom of the ocean, was, sadly, impossible, since the very definition of the deepest parts of the ocean included an absence of light and air. So, I was left with building something around the concepts defining a city and the depth of the ocean.

The trunk would need to be like optic fiber to transmit light, while behaving like an independent forest on both of its extremities. So... maybe some kind of mangrove island on the surface of the water? While the trunk itself should be able to grow, so making it a collection of thousands of single filaments would likely be the optimal solution, The island above would be akin to a water lily on the surface of a spec of water. Even if said water lily was of the dimension of an island, and the spec of water was a stretch of the ocean.

So I started to work with a single groove seed.

May 6th 2010

The sky, at 10 kilometers above sea level, started to stop looking light blue and started to turn darker and darker, the atmosphere thinning and failing to refract sunlight in a way that could hide the void of outer space. The wind was harsher than one would have expected, and colder, but then again, as I recycled the solar radiation that hammered down on me, I was protected from the more nocive side effects.

Obviously, castles weren't made to float around. It was common sense, and yet one of the most fascinating challenges that I had ever faced. Why make only a random castle fly among the clouds? Why not islands, or continents? The latter would cause problems, since moving fast or not, its shadow would be so great that it would undoubtedly kill whatever fields and forests it was cast upon, but an island? Especially if kept high enough to keep its shadow small.

So, flying islands. I could probably figure out something more elegant than a simple lump of rock that actively recycled some of the vast energy that would otherwise move the tectonic plates, or even some adaptation of the magnetical field of the planet. No, what I needed had to be... subtler, and still more simple than the runic based enchantment that would one day fail.

It was extraordinary, how the most beautiful magics were also the simplest, at least conceptually. So, while I hovered at 10,000 meters above the sea, I laughed at myself for how long it had taken me to try *this*. I reached through True Knowledge to the wider world, falling into myself at the same time.

It was a process that I had grown accustomed to during the years, my perception of reality had been shattered time and time again, until the synesthesia that my brain crafted in order for me to have a point of referment started to make sense.

First, the air. I thought, and I pulled on the respective elements of the World-Soul, gently coaxing them into following my bidding. Physics was put aside in order for the Impossible to become a Pillar supporting this section of Reality. Air multiplied itself around me, solar winds being leashed along gravitational pull of distant asteroids in order to have enough energy to twist the strands of reality in a more acceptable tapestry.

Slowly at the beginning, and then faster and faster, air blossomed around me, the Earth's atmosphere growing beyond what the planet's gravity could have otherwise allowed. Still, a part of my will had kept still the strand of Sunlight, which pierced without issues the outer layer of the atmosphere, ignoring the refractive properties of the newly formed air.

Clouds immediately started to drift in patterns that followed the newly forming winds, cumulonimbus and cirrus alike twisting and breaking apart under the contrasting forces of thermodynamic nature which would have pushed the clouds where the air was warmer and the gravity that kept them from rising where their density was higher than the air itself.

As I pulled upon the strands of reality, a distant element made itself known just beyond the corner of my eye: the moon.

Without forgetting my plans for making colonization possible, and since I was already manipulating the atmosphere, I tugged on the

gravitational pull between Earth and its Satellite, turning the gravity that kept the moon from skyrocketing away through outer space into something... different.

As the kinetic energy of the moon lowered itself imperceptibly, and the distance between it and the Earth started to shrink in order to gain a new balance, Air blossomed once more following the channel I had prepared in the World-Soul's Tapestry.

Like an umbilical cord, air that didn't refract or reflect sunlight stretched through the distance, until Earth and Moon were linked together, a thin and Impossible atmosphere tying itself around the satellite, empowered and kept there by a fraction of the kinetic energy that kept the Moon moving. While the connection between Earth and Moon would still be unaffected by light, separated by it like oil was from water, I let the Old Reality Rules, or Physics, minutely affect the atmosphere on the Moon, gifting it with the possibility Dawn and Sunset that otherwise would have never been appreciated on the satellite.

Time tended to become wobbly when I directly acted upon the strands that defined Reality, so, hours or days or weeks after I started manipulating Air, it was the turn of adapting the concept of [Cloud] to my designs.

My will stretched, plunging in the World-Soul and orientation itself keeping my spear as a starting point, as an anchor to not lose myself, until I stumbled, or found, the concept of [Island].

It was a strand that stretched throughout the concept of [Sea], and it made sense. So I plucked it, no, I tested the tapestry in order to bring the concept of [Cloud] and [Island] closer in a way that broke clean through Physics, and yet the transition was smooth and clear.

But an island needed a sea, and I couldn't use the [Air] like a sea for the [Island], since Islands are still, and I wished for something more dynamic and ever-evolving. So, another twist of reality's tapestry saw [Sea] and [Cloud] intertwining one with the other, and the

previously formed concept of [Island-Cloud] immediately latched on the [Sea-Cloud], keeping it as both anchor and base.

The [Sea-Cloud] was kept together with something different than gravity, something different than kinetic energy, it was a deeper connection of the voices of concepts that had existed since the first island was born on Earth, it was a communion of the soul, and not something that could easily be torn apart.

Slowly, I retracted myself from

A fraction of my awareness plunged into Reality's tapestry once more, and I pictured the strand of [Self] back in London, and so I was gone.

Month Unknown, Day Unknown, year 2058

Giving self-awareness and sapience to random animals had been difficult, but since I had managed it with Raven, albeit with an improvised ritual at the time, replicating it without giving to the newborns previous knowledge of the world had been much easier. The growing sociopathic in me hadn't cared about the collateral effects, but I recognized that I was firmly in Frankenstein's domain.

Regular animals could become self-aware. Gorillas had learned the sign language, and one had been explained to Quigley, a western lowland gorilla, that one day he was going to die. The animal had expressed sadness, gone into depression, panic, self-hatred because he couldn't find a way to avoid death. Sadly, it was something limited to primates, because of how their brain was structured and their simil-human body-shape, which allowed us a relatively easy way to communicate with them.

Creating a shape that could comfortably host the blend of human and animal, and develop accordingly to the animal chosen for the new life form had been tricky, and more than the animagus

transformation, the werewolf curse had proven itself of fundamental importance.

I walked slowly in the small building I had built in Wonderland for me to conduct my more time-consuming researches. It was a two-story building with the space inside suitably enlarged, which allowed me several wings to dedicate to a particular venue of research.

As I entered the third corridor, I felt the big oaken doors behind me lock themselves, I wouldn't want a specimen to run away, would I? I made my way towards the silver cage where the man I had captured was sleeping. He was remarkably prone to cannibalism, preferring the tender flesh of children when he could manage. Truly, the man without matched the monster within.

Like all deep-changes, the werewolf was magic that acted upon the soul. Not tearing it apart like the procedure to create a Horcrux did, but adding to it, somehow forming a bridge between the human and the wolf, that sadly ended up as an unholy mess of rage and claws. Since when I first gave form to the magic that shaped the Sky of Wonderland, several changes had naturally occurred, albeit aided by the meddling me.

I had plunged myself deep into the world-soul, letting it flow around me and not trying to manipulate it, only seeing if I were able to recognize a strand of it. Which was the equivalent of recognizing a single drop in a churning whirlpool while being tossed around by the currents. It had taken me years only to be able to feel myself, to keep a hold over my purpose while submerged in the dance of the souls that composed the reality I had always lived in, and even longer to be able to reach that exact state of mind on command.

That had been the starting point. From there, I had started to 'hear', looking for a particular voice amongst the apparent-chaos. Even then, I had to relearn how to not lose myself while listening, and once I had reliably managed it, I started to refine my hearing. The bigger was the familiarity with something, the easier it was for me to hear' in the right direction, before pressing (the more delicately I

could) my soul over what I deemed necessary for me to observe. Like I did once to learn Parseltongue, albeit without need for a ritual to aid me, I slowly managed to find the strand I had been looking for.

As I was deep into the flowing of the souls, I found myself more often than not cast outside the realm of time and space, with every heartbeat of mine as long as an Ice Age. While the soul of every living being subject to a cycle of birth growth reproduction and death was primed to be able to adapt at speeds that were mind-boggling if referred to the time needed for the smallest change to naturally occur on their not living counterparts, like the rising of mountains or oceans running dry, I still needed time to properly manipulate those.

I watched with a clinical expression the baby elephant that I had managed to produce. I called it a baby elephant, but it was already 20 meters tall.

Since I have already played enough with other species and humans, maybe I can make myself 4 meters tall? It would be hilarious, if only to see if I am capable of it.

100 years later

They didn't manage to find a common ground. I sighed. It was to be expected, really, muggles and wizards were still humans, and as such they feared what was different, like evolution had engraved into their minds before they were even born.

Which was the common ground where I could bring everybody? On what could I bet the peace among humans, beasts, plants and world? Change. Everything changed, and everything was connected through change. Time brought change into both the DNA and the souls of every being, it was evolution at its simplest after all.

How to make it so that vampires wouldn't distrust mermaids, unicorns wouldn't distrust humans, wizards wouldn't distrust the muggles?

It was my last Act of Great Magic for the world. A common ground for them to live into, sharing the understanding born from the will to live, which was their common denominator. Granting Magic to [Everything].

I didn't quite know how Magic would adapt to every living being, but I knew that it was possible. If something had a will, then what I was about to do would make it so that will could be expressed instinctually, leveraging and growing of the biological imperatives that everything alive shared [Survive], be it through toughening oneself, through becoming capable of discerning the best path to walk, or simply through the willful violence over others that was imperative in every pack-minded beings, I didn't know, but sure as hell I was going to make it real.

I walked aimlessly in Italy until I spotted what I had been looking for: a small hill, with only a few tended fields over it. With a negligent wave of my spear, people started trailing away from the location, bringing with them their machines and all that they could carry while I walked in a circle at the base of the hill, the sharp point of my spear dragging itself slowly in the ground, while my will shaped the act of cutting into something else.

After my first successful prototype (tested on a muggle man that I had kidnapped), I had realized that I couldn't create copies of the same weeks I hadn't understood. Why couldn't I craft more than a single Ritual of Change for each element or idea it referred to? The answer was fairly obvious: while the souls of eagles alive were indeed countless, (the same went for everything, really) the "imprint" of [eagle] on the world-soul was singular. Each eagle was unique, because of the experiences it had accumulated through its life, but when the egg was firstly fertilized, an idea of the soul it would grow up to be was already there, taken from a shard of the world-soul.

Once I had completed my circular walk around the hill, I walked to the top of the small hill, and with a grunt, I tethered myself to the world-soul, slowly but surely displacing a tiny amount of its kinetic energy.

Again, for this Act of Great Magic, I would need to leverage an imaginary set of beliefs that humanity had always shared. Something impossible coming from the sky, where more often than not gods were thought to reside.

The price for granting to every living being the possibility of channelling their will in a reality-defying manner was going to be steep, but even then I wanted to create ever possible Soul Changing Fruit.

I also knew however, that I couldn't spend the rest of my eternity to craft Soul Fruits. I was in the middle of what was likely to be the most complex magic conundrum of my life, when the result had come to me from the most unexpected sources: once more the collective imaginary built through the Bible.

They were fruits, were they not? They were a blend of Elixir and Ideas, a metaphysical mixture between what was real and what could be real. So I needed something that could pull from the world-soul, and infuse a shard of it in a ' Soul Fruit'. Which was the name I've given to the Edible Ritual of Soul-Change.

Basically, I was going to make the creation of Soul Fruits industrialized and automated, and once more forced by symbolism, I needed to use a tree to make it happen.

The small hill shook, and with less of a whisper of displaced air, we were orbiting around Earth.

The ground and dirt clung together and toughened under my will, it swirled and flowed in patterns and shapes that served its function. For a brief instant, I looked around, my eyes falling over countless stars and planets. There was a beauty to it, a rhythm to the Dance of Stars that I could almost hear, something.. something...

I shook myself back to my senses when the Sun harshly glared on me. And taking advantage of the lumps of straw waiting around the small hill turned into an orbiting island, I shielded my head from the

wild sun that burned so harshly. With a twist of will that was more instinct than anything else, I realized a straw hat, securing it to my forehead tightening it with a red stripe of cloth that I permanently conjured.

I had to enlarge myself several times, my regular human form wouldn't be enough for me to properly guide each branch of the Tree. Yggdrasil. The price would be steep, asking of me what I held most dear, and I couldn't pull back from even a single part of the sacrifice.

The island was floating peacefully in orbit, and by then I only needed to breathe life into the stone, and it could be done only in one way.

I gathered myself, holding with both hands the spear at the top of the orbiting hill and shaping the rock around it with a slow and steady speed. From the core of the hill, the fossilized wood I had painstakingly collected and prepared rose like a weed. As soon as the 'tree' reached two meters of height, flowing around the spear that was being used as a fulcrum, it parted in three major branches.

Slowly, writing themselves as I acted, symbols start writing themselves on the trunk, flowing in patterns that would have made me lose myself if I were to look too closely. Raven hopped out from an enlarged pocked when the moment came, and as my hands closed around her, she gave a croaking laugh, like she was telling me to not worry about what was going to happen. As I placed her at the beginning of one of the three main branches, I guided a tendril of the spear that was slowly coming undone to my familiar, who gave up a part of herself with a squawk of understanding.

After a minute during which I carefully pulled and pushed at the forces that regulated the foundation of newborn souls, the stone closed around feathers and blood from Raven, burying those within once my hands loosened their grip. The branch flowed upwards, forking again and again, as the types of Fruits it would need to produce required a different setup. The Soul Changing Rituals born

from Raven's branch would pluck their imprint out of the imprints of all that came into being with a well defined vital cycle.

I moved sideways, my hands fishing the jar that contained Fleur out of another pocket: pouring the liquid blue and white flames in the palm of my hand, I placed her at the beginning of the second branch, once more guiding tendrils of my spear to the 'presence' of Fleur. And like it had happened for Raven, the liquid fossil wood closed around her, flowing forward like another branch of the tree, I knew that from there would blossom fruits capable of acting both as the bridge toward an element as well as the anchor necessary to keep the ones that one day would use them tethered to their original body.

The third branch was going to born Rituals that tied the soul of the eater to everything that did possess neither a quiescent nor a conscious will, to the all things that didn't match either the first or the second branch: with a wet lurch, I pulled out from my eyesocket the philosopher stone, which had remained part of me for so long that it could no longer ignore its bond to my soul.

I waited for the fossilized wood branch to envelop the red stone, a curious tendril of vines already tethering it to the spear that acted as fulcrum of the tree. And once all three branches were linked to the spear hidden in the core of the growing stone wood, I witnessed the flowing branches of fossilized wood which was now closer and closer to coming back to life intertwine themselves together, streamlining my work following ideas I could no longer witness.

I tested with longing the smooth characters flowing on the surface of my latest creation, finding them alive and hungry: and as my last act, to give life to something that didn't have one, and that didn't have any right to, I gave my ability to affect my world with my will.

As the bond between my soul and the world thinned, my understanding of reality grew dimmer, the colors shifting in shades of themselves, and I was quick to return what was left of Fleur and Raven to pockets of my enchanted coat.

What was magic? The ability to impose your will on the world.

So, as water condensed on the surface of the fossilized wood, droplets started forming small rivulets that soon found their way to the edge of the hill, raining on the world below, crossing tens of kilometers of atmosphere and dispersing themselves in a thin mist that would reach everywhere in the world, giving to those that lacked it what was necessary for their will to breach the cold laws of the mundane world.

With a last spasm of consciousness, my heart lurched, and as the tether that tied me to the reality I had so deeply affected broke, I was no more.

AN

Did I use the MC's OP-ness to turn the World into a base for One-Piece?

Yes.

Yes, I did.

23. sequel warning

SEQUEL WARNING

Hello to all, I've already said it, but let's make it official: I got started with a sequel. In 'A Tale in Alagaësia', I'll try very hard to work on both my characterization and a proper 'plot', so I hope you'll give it a try.

Notes on both The Bigger Picture and what I'll try to achieve in 'A Tale in Alagaësia':

- 1) The Bigger Picture was my first ever written work, and mostly written in order to play around with a cohesive magical system.**
- 2) I never intended to focus or work on my characterization in this fic, what I managed to put in were random attempts, nothing more.**
- 3) Even more, I never had a whole idea behind the story proper, there was no 'plot' as many have correctly observed.**
- 4) The MC has been created and written in order to allow me to play around with magic, nothing more.**

The final... sucks, but I still completed this ff because, since the MC duel with Voldemort, there was very little in terms of 'story development' that I felt happy to play with. There are dozens of fics that play with the dystopic world post Statute (Rise of the Wizards for one, For Love of Magic for another) and I felt that there was nothing original that I could add to the conflict between magic and not-magic worlds. So if I had to wait for a proper ending to find its way on my keyboard, I would have never completed this fic, maybe one day I'll add a different ending, who knows.

So, I wrapped it up with the creation of a deeper connection with the Whole, but there have been consequences to the MC developing a bigger and bigger bond with the World-soul.

Namely, he managed to cling only to his immediate desire (offing Voldemort) and then he kept up his Great Acts Of Magic on his own. Because he didn't need help, and because, interconnected as he was with Everything, he didn't feel any kind of remote need to forge a bond with another mortal, since, psychologically speaking, he already felt like he had said bonds. And given his starting point of casual misanthropy, it has done him no favours.

In hindsight, I can try and justify the 0 characterization of the MC saying that the utter lack of care for everything but magic that has characterized David Taylor since the beginning and only got worse since then, is in part caused by his own growing connection with the Whole

Months ago I have thought about my MC ending up in the Inheritance Cycle-verse, and even offered a one-shot that I wrote in a couple of hours.

I have been thinking about it...

A lot...

And I received several PMs offering ideas and whatnot.

And I admit that I can do something interesting with the MC in Eragon's world.

But not with him as he is at the end of the Bigger Picture, since there he is basically God, like many have correctly pointed out.

So, I will resort to the waiting aid fundamental in most crossovers: Nerfing. But I will do it with in-lore logic, and not simply because I can.

In short, David Taylor could channel the flow of the World Soul in the Potterverse. Because there I built a magic system based on animism.

Inheritance-verse magic doesn't have souls. Or at least, not in the same way (spirits and the manifestation of Guntera are quite telling that there are things Paolini left unanswered).

So, while there will be some exploring of the Lore, it will be far less extensive, mostly because there is very little to explore magic-wise. Instead, I'll try to work on the characterization, along with a storyline that actually has a direction.

Why would the MC end up involved in the happenings of the world, given his previous track of 'fuck it'?

Because as an author, I'll place (happy or not) the MC between a rock and a harder place. How? Quite simply, by killing canon. Killing it with fire.