

ATTEMPTED BREAK-IN AT THE DEPARTMENT OF MINISTRIES!

SOURCES CLAIM THE INTRUDER WAS CAUGHT RED-HANDED.

Harry read the main headlines of the Prophet, which jolted his memory a little bit. There was some incident involving a Ministry employee trying to gain access to the Prophecy. If his memory was correct, Lucius Malfoy had the man under the Imperius curse take the Prophecy from the Department of Mysteries. He didn't remember the full name but was sure the wizard's name was Bode. He also recalled that this Bode fellow was assassinated using a pot plant which was Devil's Snare.

'Maybe the guy was an employee of the Department of Mysteries.' Harry mused.

If Voldemort was now going after the Prophecy proactively, the man was nearly ready to break out his loyal Death Eaters from Azkaban. For a moment, Harry entertained the idea of going after Azkaban inmates, but he discarded it almost immediately. Even if he wanted to take out Voldemort's most loyal Death Eaters, he was not strong enough to breach the protections of Azkaban. There were thousands of Dementors standing guard over the wizarding prison, not to mention there were aurors stationed on the island. Even if he could overcome the Dementors with the Patronus charm, the aurors would prove to be a costly hurdle to overcome.

Harry searched the Prophet for the intruder's identity, but the name was not mentioned anywhere. He gathered that the Ministry was covering it up either by the insistence of Fudge or the insistence of the Department of Mysteries. He assumed the DoM didn't want the public to know one of their own got cursed for stealing something from them in the heart of the Ministry. With all that was happening in the Ministry, he gathered they'd be looking to suppress all juicy stories to the best of their ability. Even the story of Umbridge got some coverage from the Prophet despite the best efforts of the Ministry.

The lack of Malfoy's boots pressing down on the Prophet kept the daily paper free to take a more unbiased reporting style. That said, Harry was aware Damien Greengrass was now in possession of the majority controlling shares of the Daily Prophet. Daphne's father had written to him after the events leading to the deal between the Ministry, the Board of Governors and the students. It was mutually agreed between them to let the Ministry off the hook so that further down the line, they could bury the current Ministry in graft charges and criminal behaviour of high-level employees of the Ministry.

Harry was not included in the whole plan cooked up by his grandmother, but he was let in on the fact that the Flamels were intent on overhauling the current Wizengamot and the British Ministry of Magic. He was not particularly against that idea, as he was in favour of dismantling the entire Ministry. There was too much-entrenched incompetence, institutionalised nepotism, and racial bias in the Ministry. That doesn't mean he was an unthinking liberal-minded person. He was more than aware that bringing down an age-old institution like the Wizengamot had its own adverse effects.

He believed it was a type A and type B error problem. No matter what choice he made, there was going to be a slew of consequences.

'I could pretend nothing is wrong and use the current system to my benefit. Or, I could take the risk of working with the Flamels and create something new, hoping for the best.' Harry thought, setting aside the Prophet on the Gryffindor table.

"Hey, Harry."

Harry looked up from the paper to look at Ron, who plopped into the seat across from him on the Gryffindor table.

"Hey, Ron. You are supporting the 'claws?'" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow at Ron's blue and bronze cap.

"Those Puffs one-upped us in the last game." Ron said, filling his plate with food from the table.

"That was in the third year. You haven't let that go, huh." Harry chuckled, taking a bite out of the boiled egg on his plate.

"No one's let that go." said Katie as she joined him at the table.

She was also wearing a similar cap. To Harry's surprise, there was an animated image of a badger on a broom getting electrocuted by lightning.

"The 'claws made these for the game?" Harry asked, impressed at the creativity and charmwork.

"No, it was the Twins. They are selling it for three Sickles." said Katie.

"Huh. Good for them, I suppose." Harry shook his head, wondering how the Weasley twins managed to find time for all their work.

"Say, Harry. Are you free this Christmas holidays?" Ron suddenly asked. "Mum has invited you to the Burrow for Christmas."

"I'm sorry, Ron. I have some other plans for the holidays." said Harry, thinking about his plan to acquaint himself with the Giants.

"What plans?" Ron looked a little put-off. "Even Sirius is invited, and mum says he's coming."

Harry cursed himself for not letting Sirius into his plans. Then again, he was sure Sirius would oppose his adventure into the mountains to clean out some tribes of Giants.

"I forgot to tell Sirius. I was invited to spend the Solstice with Daphne's family, and I agreed. Sorry, Ron." Harry smiled apologetically at Ron.

"Sol- what?" Ron looked lost.

"Seriously? You haven't heard of the Winter Solstice?" Katie asked, rolling her eyes and muttering about 'dumb boys'.

"It's just another name for Christmas, Ron. But more accurate in meaning." Harry explained, but he only managed to confuse the younger Weasley more.

In the end, he had to explain exactly what Christmas meant for the muggles and what Winter Solstice meant for wizards.

“So, you are saying Christmas is the celebration of the birth of some fellow named Jesus.”

“Jesus Christ.” Harry corrected.

“Right. And they celebrate this fellow’s birthday in winter even though he is supposed to be born in spring.” Ron looked confused.

“Yes.” Harry didn’t explain further as he doubted Ron would understand a word of his explanation, and he didn’t really have the patience to involve all the details that led to Christmas.

“Wicked! Who was this guy? Was he some king?” Ron asked, with a mouthful of eggs.

“I suppose, you could say he was a king of sorts. But mainly people worship him because he was a good guy.” said Harry, keeping the details to a bare minimum, not wanting a discussion on religion right in the middle of the Great Hall.

“A good guy? What do you...”

“Ron, he was a Merlin-like figure for the muggles.” said Harry.

“Oh! Okay, that makes sense, I suppose.” Ron muttered, going back to wiping his plate clean.

“Yeah. Enjoy your breakfast, Ron. I’ve some errands to run.” said Harry, quickly escaping from the table when he noticed Daphne was finished with her breakfast and waving at him from the hall’s entrance.

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“I don’t see why you are so obsessed with chocolate frogs. Don’t you find it weird to eat a frog made of chocolate that...”

“*Croak!*”

“...does that?” Harry finished, looking pointedly at the flailing frog made of chocolate in Daphne’s palm.

“No. It’s so fun to have a chocolate frog.” Daphne said, smiling at Harry before biting off the head of the frog so that it’d stop croaking.

“Oh, look! It’s a Dumbledore card. That should even up my collection.” Harry heard her mutter.

“You have a card collection?” Harry raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, yes. She is obsessed with those. She has a room full of collected vintage cards. If I’m not wrong, this one will put the tally on 105 for her Dumbledore card collection.” Austria butted in from behind.

“What the...! Astoria! What are you doing here?” Daphne turned on her sister with her eyes blazing.

“What else am I here for? For the game, of course.” Astoria said, looking pointedly at the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff teams fighting it out in the brooms for victory.

“No. That’s not what I meant. What’re you doing here near us? Go somewhere else.” Daphne pushed Astoria’s face away from near their shoulders.

“I don’t think I will. I will be right here to watch out for any funny business.” Astoria huffed.

Daphne looked like she was about to curse the head off her sister, but at the last moment, she just huffed and ignored Astoria all together.

“Just pretend the little demon is not behind us.” Daphne bit out to Harry.

Harry saw Daphne’s annoyance, so he kept silent and let the Greengrass sisters sort out their problems. The stands erupted in a roar taking Harry’s attention back to the game. He noticed Cedric and Cho were chasing after the snitch, with bludgers whizzing past their sides. A collective groan was heard in the stands when both seekers were unable to maintain the chase and pull out as the snitch went past the Hufflepuff chasers while they were passing the quaffle between them.

Harry discreetly took out his wand and cast the muffling charm around him and Daphne.

“Anything we say will sound gibberish to others.” Harry explained when he noticed Daphne look at him curiously.

“Have you passed along the message to your father?” Harry asked.

“Yes. He’ll be waiting at King’s Cross station.” said Daphne, looking at him out of the corner of her eyes.

“What exactly is this about? Is it about Umbridge?” she asked after a moment of silence.

“No. We’ve already decided to let Umbridge off the hook and the Ministry to play cat and mouse for the time being.”

“Then what is it?” Daphne became more curious.

“It is better that you don’t know. It concerns the Dark Lord.” said Harry, making Daphne freeze.

“I see.” she fell silent after that.

“Has Professor Babbling said anything about conducting the ritual?” Harry suddenly asked.

“She has. We’ll start next Monday. Are you interested in joining in?” Daphne asked.

“Sure. It was fun last time. So, why not.” Harry shrugged.

“What are you two whispering about, and why can’t I hear you?” Astoria butted in, making Daphne engage her sister in another fight about privacy.

Harry suppressed his laughter as the two sisters were at each other’s throats and turned his attention back to the game.

“All right, Potter. You’ve got this.” Harry muttered to himself as he stared at the wooden practice dummy the Room of Requirement provided.

Harry squared his shoulders and was about to launch the spell. He could feel sweat roll off his temples as he stared at the dummy holding a makeshift wand in its hand. His eyes strayed to the walls of the room, enforced by magic to his wishes so that he could test out this dangerous spell.

“Nope.” Harry let out the air he was holding, losing his cool. “This is a bad idea. This is a bad idea.”

Harry muttered under his breath as he walked back and forth in the room. There was no other option but to practice the spell. If he were to take out the giants for good from the battle, he needed the spell. It was the only way he could ensure many giants would sustain serious injuries and get dissuaded from joining Voldemort. The most powerful spell in his arsenal was the lightning spell, and giants tend to have thick skin that allows them to survive lightning attacks. He couldn’t even seriously injure Dawlish using his best lightning spell, so he gathered it would be at most annoying to a giant.

This led Harry straight to the doorstep of one of the most dangerous spells known to wizardkind. Unlike the lightning spells, the Ministry had classified this spell as dark magic, with good cause. The spell that he was so afraid to use was the Fiendfyre spell, which required genuine rage to manifest the hellish hungry flames. Finding no respite, he sat on the floor and tried to centre himself to keep a tight lid on his emotions. Using the Fiendfyre spell with an untethered mind was ripe for disaster.

It took him a while, but he was in a steady emotional state when Harry opened his eyes. Taking to his feet, he stood across from the wooden dummy conjured by the RoR and hoped it would work as he expected. Taking a deep breath, he summoned rage that sought only destruction and nothing else. To manifest rage of that level, he imagined the smiling face of Dolores Umbridge in her horrible pink garb. To spice things up, he manifested Petunia and Vernon accompanying the woman on either side, all of them having matching evil looks. Seeing those three smirking faces, he felt it natural to have the rage to destroy all three in one swoop.

“Fiendfyre.”

A thick stream of bright red flames escaped the tip of his wand. The force of the flames made his hair blow back, and the heat was almost unbearable even though he was covered in flame-repelling charms from head to toe. He was suddenly overwhelmed by the desire to see everything turn into ash as his rage only spiked to alarming levels for no reason. He was no longer even seeing the faces of Umbridge and the Dursleys. But he could hear a cackling of maniacal laughter in his ears, and the

fire surged with great power, responding to his rage. It took him a moment to realise that he was the one laughing like a maniac.

The flames of the spell surged and grew to the full height of the room, nearly touching the roof as it was slowly taking a corporeal form.

“No!” Harry screamed as he felt a searing pain behind his eyes, and he tried to cut off the spell.

With some effort, he managed to stop fueling his spell with his magic and rage. The spell broke the connection with his wand, but the Fiendfyre spell remained in the room. Harry stumbled back and raised a shield for good measure as the flames grew stronger and tried to come after him. But a giant stone golem fell on the flames making the Fiendfyre flames lose some cohesion. The flames attempted to eat the stone golem, but the golem suddenly changed into a massive ball of water that began to become steam because of the fire.

“Did the dummy just transfigure the golem into water!” Harry muttered in awe.

Honestly, the Room of Requirement’s powers were beyond compare to any piece of magic he had ever encountered.

While the water quickly turned into steam, it also ensured the flames were no longer that powerful. The leftover flames were sucked into the tip of the wooden dummy’s wand by some kind of suction spell.

‘No. It was a vacuum. The dummy created a vacuum.’ Harry thought.

That actually gave him a rather splendid idea. Harry was more than sure that he would not master the Fiendfyre curse in time to combat the giants. But he could master a charm that could potentially wipe away even the most powerful flames. Even the hellish flames of Fiendfyre cannot stand the might of the vacuum so long as he conditioned it properly.

It was simple science. Fire cannot exist without oxygen to fuel it. So, in the absence of oxygen, the fire cannot become visible and if the vacuum he hoped to create was absent of heat and any type of fuel, then fire should cease to exist.

‘So I need a spell that can create a space of vacuum pressure with nothing in it to sustain the heat of the Fiendfyre spell. Or, I could look for a spell to create a tear in space and seal away the flames in a pocket space.’ Harry thought, sitting in a room full of steam.

“I can do that. I can definitely do that.” Harry muttered, climbing to his feet, intent on changing the room back to library mode as he had some research to do.

The days leading up to the Christmas holidays were rather tense in Hogwarts. The staff always walked around eggshells with the students. In fact, there were far fewer detentions or points taken by the

teaching faculty of Hogwarts. Even grumpy old Snape was relatively silent in his lessons without his usual quirks, according to junior and senior fellow Gryffindors. The popular theory was that no one wanted to reignite the 'revolutionary spirit' in the Hogwarts students. The most affected party in this affair was Umbridge, who now walked the hallways of Hogwarts like a wet cat that somehow winded up in Hogwarts because of a stray storm. The pink-clad woman was stripped of her titles and even the basic powers afforded to her as a professor. All her decrees were thrown out of the window, and her incessant interference in Hogwarts was at an end.

Umbridge did not even utter a single word in class. She just wrote the chapter number of her dumb book on the board and sat in a corner with a moody look.

While the downfall of Umbridge was great, the Knights of Avalon only became more relevant in the following days. The lack of proper DADA classes remained a serious issue, and Harry took advantage of it. The Knights took up the issue of proper classes for DADA, and Harry had his hands full with training Gryffindors to defend themselves and organising study classes to cover the theory. While Umbridge continued to prove to be a hindrance to Hogwarts students in gaining a proper defensive magic education, she was no longer a problem for other activities in the school. Quidditch was back on track with the ban on the Gryffindor team being lifted. It was followed by the restoration of all clubs in Hogwarts, including the football games during the evenings, which Umbridge had banned.

With Umbridge unable to exert tyrannical power, conducting the ritual of Red Dawn went smoothly. Unlike last year, the ritual had to be undertaken before the Yule holidays because of the change in the alignment of the planets with the Sun as the reference point. Just like last year, he used the Parseltongue for the ritual to everyone's approval. However, this year, they had far fewer members as the seventh-year students from Ravenclaw and Slytherin participants of the last Yule had passed out of Hogwarts. The ritual not only helped make him feel powerful but also helped keep his magic cleansed of the dark taint that stuck to him from training with the Fiendfyre curse. There was an advantage to training constantly with the Fiendfyre curse. It allowed him some ease to use other dark spells, like the organ liquefying curse, without much hindrance.

Therefore, when the time came for the Yule holidays, Harry was pumped up and ready to deal another blow to Voldemort's war preparations. He just wished he could keep hold of the Elder Wand, but he had to give that up lest he attracted undue attention from Dumbledore. It was not as if he could make up a justifiable reason for him to keep the Deathstick in his possession.

'Still, the Elder Wand would've been a useful tool for performing powerful magic like Fiendfyre.' Harry thought.

There was no point in thinking about what could've been when the Elder Wand now recognised him as its master. The implications of that position were quite clear for Harry. Should a magical fight break out between him and Dumbledore, Harry knew he'd have a slight advantage as the Elder Wand's allegiance would not favour Dumbledore. It was a small detail, but every little thing counts in this long war for his survival. At the same time, there was not an enormous responsibility on his shoulders. He could not afford to get beaten in a duel or disarmed, as the Elder Wand would transfer its allegiance from him to those who defeat him.

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Harry boarded the Hogwarts Express from the Hogsmeade station.

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Perenelle Flamel could only shake her head in amusement as she read the latest reports from Evelyn Greengrass. Her grandson not only managed to summon the Sword of Gryffindor but also managed to disarm Albus, thereby becoming earning the allegiance of the Elder Wand. She had hoped to use Albus to test Harry's resilience and conviction by having her grandson forcibly take the Elder Wand.

'But destiny seems to have other plans for Harry and the Elder Wand.' she mused.

Or maybe, she could still make Harry go after Albus. After all, with the Elder Wand owing allegiance to Harry, Albus might just end up losing a magical fight with her grandson.

'Perhaps, it's time for Harry to learn from better teachers to embrace his true destiny.' Perenelle thought.

"Nicholas." she called out from her seat by the fireplace. "I think I should spend some time with Harry."

There was silence in the chamber of her home, but she felt the air move as her long-time husband and friend arrived at her side.

"Are you sure this is how you should proceed, Perenelle? There is still time for us to abandon this plan. The boy could live his life free of this burden and..."

"...and our kind will be swallowed by death within decades if we do not act. Your methods don't work, Nicholas. I gave you centuries without complaint, yet all that happened is that our kind turned tail and ran, hiding away from the world." Perenelle snapped back with anger, her eyes blazing with ancient power.

"You have failed, and you alone may carry the weight of your failure. The Millenium Conjunction arrives, and I'll have the destiny of Antioch bloodline fulfilled through my grandson. And when the Millenium passes, this Earth shall be inherited by those who deserve it, not those who kill it."

Nicholas opened his mouth to argue, but then he paused and shook his head.

"What you hope to achieve is impossible, Perenelle." Nicholas looked pained as he knelt by her side, looking pleadingly at her unforgive green eyes. "Harry Potter is not strong enough to bear the full weight of what you hope to achieve."

"Then I'll make him strong enough." Perenelle turned away from the pleading eyes of her husband and took to her feet.

"I shall be leaving for Britain to make sure the edicts of Antioch's are manifested. I hope you, of all people, would understand that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death."

