The World of The Accidental Animagus

by White_Squirrel

Summary

A series of one-shots in the Animagus-Verse showing the state of the magical world at the time of Voldemort’s return. Some brace for war, while for others, life goes on. A bridge between The Accidental Animagus and Animagus at War.

Notes

Disclaimer: Don’t mess with Texas or JK Rowling.

The story serves as a bridge between The Accidental Animagus and the sequel, Animagus at War. I wanted to pull back and look at how the magical world reacts to Voldemort’s return and generally showcase a rich world of different magical cultures that is so rarely addressed in the Pottermore.

In keeping with the background material I developed for The Accidental Animagus before the Pottermore material was released, I will be disregarding JK Rowling’s description of magical schools around the world in this story. There are 60 schools of magic in the Animagus-verse, including the old fanon favourite of the Salem Witches’ Institute.
Sequoyah Proctor of the Long River School of Arcana double-checked the address and walked up the front sidewalk to the house of the first No-Maj-born child on his list. Proctor was one of four individuals in the United States doing this job this week, although his list was the longest. A quick look over the house gave him vital clues to what he would be dealing with. The Bible quote on the doormat and the decorative cross on the door were the most telling. There was also a small sign declaring support for the U.S. Army—possibly a Gulf War veteran in the home—and a pennant declaring support for the Dallas Cowboys. Other than that, the house looked much like any other in the area—cookie-cutter homes nestled tightly together with their neighbours with a few trees and a two-car garage in a land of endless subdivisions. *The American Dream*, he thought sarcastically.

On seeing the cross and the Bible quote, he pulled his own small cross necklace out of his shirt to rest on top of his robes. Things might be different in secularised Europe, or even at Salem, but given the sensitive nature of working with devoutly religious families, Long River and Cahokia always made sure the teacher sent to meet No-Maj-born children was a practising Christian, preferably of the Evangelical persuasion. There were more than a few of those even in the magical world, and Proctor was a proud member.

He rang the doorbell. A minute later, a young-looking woman in a conservative dress opened the door and squinted slightly into the sun. It was evening, shortly after the time when the average working family would eat dinner. It was always best to include both parents in this sort of thing, and at a convenient time for them, hence the odd working hours.

“Hello, can I help you?” she said.

“Good evening, are you Mrs. Taylor?” Proctor asked.

“Yes, I am.”

He offered his hand to her. “My name is Sequoyah Proctor,” he said, shaking her hand and also handing holding up a brochure. “I represent a school for gifted children called Long River. Your son, Joshua’s, test scores indicate that he might be a good fit for our program.” Not technically a lie. Honesty was important. “Would it be possible for me to speak to him with you and your husband?”

“Gifted students?” Mrs. Taylor asked. “Well, this is a surprise. I didn’t realise Josh was doing so well. You know how kids are. Never tell you anything. Come on in. I’ll go get Mark and Josh.” She motioned him into the house and called out, “Joshua, could you come down here, please?”

“Who is it honey?” a tall, thin man with a crew cut said. Proctor suspected he had found his Gulf War veteran.

“Mark, this is…was it Sequoyah?” she clarified.

“Yes, ma’am. Sequoyah Proctor, Mr. Taylor. I represent a school for gifted students, and we’re very interested in Joshua.”

“Really? Well, pleased to meet you Mr. Proctor. Sequoyah. That’s not a name you hear much these days.”
Proctor barely reacted. He got that a lot working with No-Majes. “No, not often, but my mother is Cherokee, so—”

“What’s up, Mom?” A tall boy interrupted amid a too-loud thudding down the stairs. He also wore a crew cut, though not as severe as his father’s. A smaller girl and an even smaller boy trailed along behind him.

“Rachael, Matt, you can go back upstairs,” Mrs. Taylor said. “This man is here to talk to Joshua about his schooling.”

“Actually, Mrs. Taylor, I think it would be helpful to talk to the whole family,” Proctor stopped her. “If your other children’s scores match Joshua’s we’ll be interested in them, too, when they reach sixth grade. Um, are these all the children?”

“Oh…uh, yes, just the three…well, I guess sit down, then. Kids, this is, Mr. Proctor. Mr. Proctor is from a school for gifted students in…where is your school?”

“Louisiana.”

“Louisiana?” Mr. Taylor said in surprise. “And you came all the way out here?”

“Yes, I did…” It was time to cut to the chase, he decided. “What I’m about to tell you is going to sound extraordinary—even absurd—but I hope you will hear me out.” That certainly put the parents on edge, and they eyed him suspiciously, but he pressed on. “May I ask, do you own a computer?”

“Yes, sir, we do,” Mr. Taylor said.

“Good. Now, this will sound odd, but imagine if I could take your computer back in time and show it to my eight-times-great grandfather in Salem, Massachusetts three hundred years ago. What do you think would happen?”

Mrs. Taylor laughed a little. “They’d burn you as a witch, of course.”

“Hang, actually, not burn, but you get the idea,” Proctor replied. “They would think it was pure witchcraft, even if I tried to explain it to them. I could show them a computer, and, assuming I had electricity and the right equipment and maybe an Internet connection, I could teach them to use a computer to write reports, run programs, play games, and read message boards. I could even try to explain the principles of electricity that make it run, but to the people of Salem in 1692, it would never be anything but magic.”

“Do you have a point with this, Mr. Proctor?” Mr. Taylor said irritably.

“Yes, I do. I want you to imagine that there exists technology that is as advanced to us today as a computer would have been to the people of the 1600s—technology that our science isn’t equipped to explain yet, and which is so far advanced in our eyes that we may as well just call it magic. Imagine that the ability to use this technology is genetic—that the technology will only respond to people with certain genetic markers, which are sometimes passed down in families and sometimes occur randomly. Imagine that this technology follows consistent scientific rules, and even though scientists don’t understand it yet, they are confident that it is explainable, just as the laws of electromagnetism that govern computers are explainable.”

“Why are you saying all this?” Mr. Taylor demanded.

“Because I want you to understand that when I say that magic is real, am I not referring to any Biblical or spiritual definition of magic. I’m referring to natural forces that appear to defy the natural
Both parents gave Proctor an icy stare when he finished his speech, and Mr. Taylor said, “I think you need to leave, Mr. Proctor.”

And that was why he didn’t like using this gambit. This was the point where the No-Maj parents usually wanted to throw him out as a crank regardless of their religious views. “I will leave if you wish,” he said calmly, “but it will not change the truth of my words. Before you dismiss them, I want to ask you one question: has anything strange—anything unexplainable or impossible ever happened around Joshua, or any of your children, for that matter? Particularly when they were scared or angry?”

That stopped the entire family cold. The parents turned to look at their children worriedly, and the children looked back and forth between their parents and each other. Finally, Mrs. Taylor worked up the courage to speak up. “You mean things like…objects seeming to jump into the children’s hands, flowers blooming out of season, and mysterious failures of electrical appliances?”

“Yes, ma’am, that’s precisely it. Those sorts of outbursts are common among the children we work with, and they are triggered by strong emotions.”

The family looked scared, now, especially Mr. and Mrs. Taylor. “How could you possibly know that?” the woman said shakily. “We’ve never told anyone.”

“We have ways of detecting those…events wherever they occur. We’ve detected quite a few of them around this house over the years.”

“So you’re saying,” Mr. Taylor said, “that our kids have these…these supernatural powers?”

“I did not say supernatural, Mr. Taylor.”

“I don’t care what you said! You’re talking witchcraft and sorcery. We do not associate with that, and we will not have you influencing our children with such talk. Kids, go back upstairs. Now. We’ll discuss this later,” he told his children. “Mr. Proctor, you have more than overstayed your welcome.”

Proctor sighed and took a step backwards towards the door. He hoped they would let him get his last couple of arguments in before he had to leave and resort to Plan B. (Plan B usually involved having a wizard pastor approach a No-Maj pastor who was known to the family.) But just before he spoke, Mrs. Taylor said, “Mark, wait.”

“Ruth, what is it?” Mr. Taylor said.

“I don’t think we should dismiss him so quickly.”

“Are you kidding me? You heard what he said!”

“Yes, Mark, I heard what he said. But I also know the kids haven’t been attending Black Masses or drinking chicken’s blood, and yet strange things keep happening around them. You’ve seen it, too. I don’t think they’re even doing it deliberately. How can you explain that?”

“I—I don’t know,” he said, with a pained expression. “I don’t know where they could have picked up something like that. We’ve tried to raise them right, keep them away from demonic influences—”

At that point, Proctor took his chance and interrupted, “If I may, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor, I’m a practising Southern Baptist, so I know where you’re coming from, and I understand your concern.
But my whole argument was that what we call ‘magic’ today for convenience and historical reasons is not the same as what the Bible calls forbidden magic any more than electricity is. I firmly believe that it is scientifically explainable, even though we don’t understand the science, yet.”

That clearly didn’t assuage Mr. Taylor, and even Mrs. Taylor still looked conflicted, but at least they stopped trying to push him out the door. Proctor cast a furtive glance up at the stairs and was oddly pleased to see the three children eavesdropping behind their parents’ backs. “It’s one thing to say that,” Mr. Taylor said. “If you claim to know the Bible. You believe you can justify these…ideas of yours?”

“That clearly didn’t assuage Mr. Taylor, and even Mrs. Taylor still looked conflicted, but at least they stopped trying to push him out the door. Proctor cast a furtive glance up at the stairs and was oddly pleased to see the three children eavesdropping behind their parents’ backs. “It’s one thing to say that,” Mr. Taylor said. “If you claim to know the Bible. You believe you can justify these…ideas of yours?”

“I think we’ve established that they’re more than just ideas.” Proctor considered giving them a demonstration now, but he held off a bit longer, hoping he could make them more comfortable with it first. “And yes, I can. Now, I will freely admit that there are a range of views about what we call magic, even among Christians. But the vast majority of us believe there is no conflict. First, there is the way that magic works. There are Christians, Jews, Atheists, Pagans, and all other major religions who are witches and wizards—again, this is the colloquial terminology inherited from centuries past. We all cast the same spells in the same way—or at least we can—without calling on any common spirits, demonic or otherwise. As I said, it’s not demonic at all. It’s genetic. Magic behaves essentially like science. It follows fixed laws that we can discern, and we can run repeatable experiments on it.”

“I suppose that would be fine if it’s true,” Mr. Taylor replied, “but you haven’t given us any evidence.”

“I know, and unfortunately, I can’t demonstrate very much that would be able to convince you on that point. But I will add another point: if you take a close look at the original Greek and Hebrew words involved—and if you make certain allowances, admittedly—then you’ll find that the only forms of magic that are unambiguously condemned by the Bible are divination and necromancy. Now, there is a long history of divination in the magical community, but there’s also a long history of divination in the No-Maj community—”

“No-Maj?” Mrs. Taylor cut in.

“Excuse me. No-magic. The point is that most schools in the Americas don’t teach divination anymore, and no reputable school has ever taught necromancy.”

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor stood silently in thought for a minute. This was a good sign, since they were actually considering his words. Eventually, Mr. Taylor said, “I admit that all sounds plausible, Mr. Proctor, but I hope you’ll forgive us if we’re hesitant to accept your interpretation.”

Proctor shrugged: “Not everyone does. There are a range of views. However, many, if not most witches and wizards in the United States are good Christian men and women who see their natural magic as just that—a natural talent—a gift from God, even. And they see forbidden magic that calls on spirits or demons as something entirely different and won’t have anything to do with it.

“I know some Christians who do practice divination and justify it by saying it’s as scientific as the rest of magic, and after all, there was a time when predicting the weather by No-Maj means was considered witchcraft. Personally, I think that it’s wishful thinking and rationalising away the plain meaning of the text. On the other hand, there are some of us who eschew magic entirely. However, even if your children choose that lifestyle, they will still need education in how to control their magic. Otherwise, these ‘strange occurrences’ will keep happening and will likely get worse.”

Mr. Taylor’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Do we get a choice in this?”

“Not exactly. There are a few tutors who teach the limited curriculum of just controlling magic, but
I’m afraid that magical education is mandatory from the ages of eleven to sixteen.”

“How can you do that? It’s a free country!”

Proctor shook his head. “Not like that, Mr. Taylor. With No-Maj education, even with homeschooling, you’re free to educate your children in any way you wish, but you must educate them. Well, if you have magical children, you must educate them magically. That is enforced by the Department of Magical Education under the Magical Congress of the United States, the same as with ordinary school.”

“There’s a magical Congress?” Mr. Taylor slapped a hand to his forehead and was starting to look a bit faint. “God help us, one is bad enough.”

“I know the feeling. But even more important than that is the fact that you won’t want to stop your children’s magical education, either. You’ll at least need to have them taught in self-control. I told you, these strange occurrences they’ve been experiencing—what we call ‘accidental magic’—are fuelled by strong emotions, and without learning control, they’ll only get worse as they enter their teenage years—both more dangerous and more conspicuous to the outside world, neither of which are good for anyone involved. Ignoring it won’t work. Therapy won’t work. Strict discipline is as likely to make it worse, and ditto for exorcisms—and believe me, I’ve seen all of those and more. The only thing that will work is a competent magical education. Even if Joshua hangs up his wand for good when he turns sixteen, he’s going to need it.”

“His wand?” Mrs. Taylor said sceptically.

That seemed like as good an opportunity as any. Proctor drew a small stick from his sleeve and held it up for them to see. “This is a highly-refined instrument for focusing the natural energies around us and making them do useful work—or, as we prefer to call it because it’s easier, a magic wand. He pointed the stick at the television set and said, “Wingardium Leviosa.” The Taylor Family all gasped as the TV rose into the air, spun around once, and then settled back down.

“Woooow!”

“Josh!” Mr. Taylor spun around as all three of his children ran down the stairs.

“Rachael! Matt!” Mrs. Taylor said. “Were you listening the whole time?”

The kids all nodded before they realised that might get them in trouble.

“We told you to go upstairs.”

The older two children looked sorry at once, but little Matt piped up, “Can you teach us how to do that, Mr. Proctor?”

“Matt, shut up!” Joshua whispered.

“We’re not doing anything for sure yet,” Mr. Taylor said sternly. “Mr. Proctor was only here about Joshua, and we need to think it over and pray about it before we decide anything.”

“But you did say it was all three of them, didn’t you?” Mrs. Taylor asked.

Proctor shook his head: “I only know about Joshua for sure. It’s in our records. But if you’ll permit me—” He held up his wand. “—there’s an easy way to find out.”

Mrs. Taylor looked to her husband questioningly, and he huffed and rolled his eyes, but he said,
“Oh, fine. It’s not like this day can get any crazier.”

He waved his wand and muttered an incantation. A golden aura flashed around him and all three of the Taylor children, who stared at each other eagerly. “Yes, it’s all three of them,” he said. “You may not appreciate this now, but that’s lucky. It’s usually easier on families if all of the children are one or the other. Now, I know this is difficult for you, but I want to try to help.” He pulled out a pen (not a quill) and wrote down some names. “I’d like to connect you with my pastor, Hezekiah Jackson. He’s also a wizard and is ordained by the Southern Baptist Convention, so he can explain the Biblical arguments better than I can. And I’d also like to connect you with some people who have given up magic because of their religious views, so you can make an informed decision.”

That kind of a show of goodwill usually went a long way and it clearly took the parents by surprise. He’d been so intent on selling the idea of magic that it didn’t seem to have occurred to them that he would advocate giving it up. “I…we…that’s very generous of you, Mr. Proctor.”

“Just doing my job, ma’am. These sorts of concerns aren’t uncommon. I just ask that you make some time to talk it over with the people I connect you with, and then, we can discuss Joshua’s educational options at a later date, say, in a week?”

The parents thought that over, and Mr. Taylor eventually agreed: “I think we can live with that, Mr. Proctor.”

“Well, that wasn’t so bad, Proctor thought as he left. He’d certainly seen much worse cases in his time.

Sequoyah Proctor returned to the Taylors’ home one week later and was relieved to find them far more receptive to him than last time. It had taken, from what he understood, several very long conversations with the people he sent to them on both sides of the issue, including Pastor Hezekiah, as well as a lot of prayer and soul-searching, before they came to terms with their children’s gifts and accepted the prevailing view (among wizards) that it was not one of the forbidden arts of the Bible. And as such, they were willing to consider Mr. Proctor’s school. The children, of course, were all very excited at the prospect of getting to learn magic with clear consciences.

“I do thank you for keeping an open mind,” Proctor told them when he arrived, “and for having me back here.”

“Oh, Mr. Proctor,” Mr. Taylor replied, much more kindly than before, “and we thank you and the others’ for your support. It’s been a difficult week for us.”

“Well, you’re not the first. There are plenty of families who have the same concerns. But since we’ve reached an understanding we can discuss Joshua’s options for schooling, and I can also answer any other questions you have about magical society.” Of course, all of the children were present, since they would likely be attending together in a few years.

“So we have a few options?” Mrs. Taylor said.

“Yes, ma’am. There are four schools in the United States—all boarding schools given the large distances involved—which all have open enrolment. There are also private tutors who teach a standard curriculum in the addition to the limited one I mentioned last week, and he could apply as an exchange student to a foreign school, but without connections in the magical world, both of the last two would be very difficult. We strongly recommend No-Maj-born students get some exposure to the magical community so that they’re not complete strangers by the time they finish.”
“Well…we never really considered boarding school before, but if it’s the best option we should probably go with it. Are the schools very different from each other?”

“Yes. Each school reflects the culture and magical traditions of its part of the country. My school is the Long River School of Arcana, situated in the bayou west of New Orleans. I teach Defensive Magic, and I’m also Dean of Admissions. Here’s our brochure.” He handed them a booklet that showed pictures of a complex of buildings and causeways snaking through a swampy forest. They were surprised to see the water rippling, and the vines swaying as they looked.

“They move!” Joshua exclaimed.

“Well, of course they do. Now, Long River is the most diverse of the four schools. We have, I believe, the most active Christian community of any of the four schools, but also other traditions. Of course, Native American culture is strong throughout the country. About ten percent of the American magical community is still Native American. We also have curanderos and other Latino wizards from here in Texas. We have African religious and magical traditions passed down from the days of the slave trade. We have voodoo practitioners from Cajun Country and the Caribbean. And that diversity has attracted a lot of immigrants from around the world to the South. It’s a little bit different from what you’re probably used to in Texas.”

“Interesting. What about the other schools?” Mr. Taylor asked.

“All different, of course. If you want the really traditional ‘Quodpot, mom, and apple pie’ America, you’ll want to go up to the Cahokia School of Magic and Midewiwin in Illinois.”

“What’s Quodpot?” Joshua interrupted.

Proctor smiled: “Imagine football played while flying on broomsticks, except instead of four downs, there’s a time limit before the ball explodes.”

“Explodes?” Mrs. Taylor said worriedly.

“Sweet!” Joshua and Matt exclaimed in unison.

“Um…we’ll worry about sports later,” Mr. Taylor said. “You were talking about…”

“Cahokia,” Proctor said. He handed them the brochure. “It’s hidden in what’s officially an undeveloped stretch of forest in southern Illinois. Most of the students from the Midwest go there, and it’s generally regarded as the most ‘traditionally American’ of the schools. Their core curriculum is pretty standard, but they also have some good regional studies such as hex signs.”

The Cahokia complex looked a little odd. It was set on a small stretch of prairie, but was encircled all around by trees. The large central building looked like it could have been lifted from an Antebellum plantation, but several other buildings on campus looked like Native American longhouses, with a variety of smaller outbuildings. But they didn’t dwell on the details before Proctor moved on to the next one.

“The third brochure is for the Salem Witches’ Institute in Massachusetts, which, despite the name, is coed. Now, Salem is built on the European model—old, ivy covered halls, uniforms, arcane traditions—the works. The course offerings reflect that, too. It’s the only American school that offers divination, and the only one that requires astronomy. It’s also unusual, as magical schools go, because most of them try to hide their existence. Being on the East Coast, that’s a little hard for them, so they generally just try to blend in and look like a No-Maj boarding school. And it’s also a short train ride away from the MACUSA headquarters in New York.”
“That was something else we were wondering about,” Mr. Taylor said. “How is it that you have your own government?”

“Well, MACUSA is older than the United States Government, but today, we function under a similar system to the federally recognised Native American Tribes. We basically have control of our own affairs, and we liaise only with the President and the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs—plausible deniability, and all that. Anyway, the last brochure is for La Escuela Hechicería de la Sierra Nevada in California.”

The Taylors turned to the last booklet and saw a complex that looked like a scaled up Spanish mission, but incongruously surrounded by redwoods.

“Cool, it looks like in Star Wars,” Joshua said.

“It’s a redwood forest, Joshua. There’s nothing alien about it—I hope,” his father said. “Would Joshua have to know Spanish—?”

“No, they teach in English,” Proctor said. “They mostly serve the western states and share a lot of that cultural influence. They teach the ritual practises of the pueblo peoples, the curandero tradition, a lot of nature magic, that sort of thing.”

“Hmm…there’s a lot of material here,” Mrs. Taylor said. “When do you need a decision?”

“Not until the end of August, although the next week or two would be best. I also have some guides to the magical population centres and transportation methods around the country, which should help you should you choose to do any shopping or just sightseeing in the meantime.” Proctor handed over some more papers of various sorts. “I would recommend getting a hold of some basic introductory books and taking out a subscription to a magical newspaper. But most importantly, I have a special notice I’ve been asked to give all the No-Maj-born students that MACUSA has issued a travel warning for the British Isles.”


“You have to understand, conflicts don’t always occur in the same places in the magical world as the No-Maj one. I’m afraid there’s a terrorist uprising in Britain right now. The terrorist leader, Voldemort, is on a crusade against No-Majes and No-Maj-born wizards. It’s an old prejudice, stronger over there than it is here. If you go there even as No-Majes, there’s a good chance someone could spot your children for magicals, and that would attract attention you don’t want.”

“Wow…this is more complicated than I thought.”

“It always is. And related to that, I have a piece of advice for you: go buy Josh a wand from Old Coyote soon.”


“Old Coyote. He’s a wandmaker. There are others, of course, but he’s probably the best in the Western Hemisphere. His store is in the magical district of New Orleans. But he’s leaving for Britain soon. He has an assignment from the International Confederations of Wizards to investigate one of Voldemort’s allies. So you’ll want to visit him before too much time passes.”

“Oh. Um, okay. Is it really that bad over there?”

“Not yet, but it could turn bad fast. It’s always hard to say…But the Brits have Albus Dumbledore
on their side, at least, and he’s probably the greatest wizard in the world, plus that boy hero of theirs, Harry Potter.”

“Who’s Harry Potter?” Joshua spoke up.

“Harry Potter,” Proctor repeated. “You can read all about him. He’s written two books of his own about all the things he’s done. I can barely believe it, myself. Only fourteen years old, and he’s the only person ever to survive the Killing Curse—which is just what it sounds like. He’s an animagus—he can turn into a cat—which is supposed to be impossible for children. He’s supposed to be brilliant at wandless magic, which most wizards never even learn. We actually corresponded about a year ago about whether we would be willing to admit werewolves. He seems like a good kid, but now, he’s all mixed up in fighting Voldemort, apparently. At least, a lot of people over there are putting their faith in him. But after all that, who know what will happen?”

“A fourteen-year-old’s done all that?” Mrs. Taylor said. “That sounds like a wild fairy tale.”

“Well, sure, it’s magic, isn’t it?” Joshua exclaimed, and his brother and sister both laughed.
Edward Grayson roamed his large manor outside of Sydney, packing the remaining items for his relocation. Normally, he believed in travelling light, but for this assignment he would need all of his spellbooks, potions, and wizarding equipment. These he would ship ahead of him while he continued to follow the songlines himself. The journey back to Britain was some twelve thousand miles. Since he knew the routes well after world tour, he could cover that in a week without much trouble, or four or five days in a pinch. At the moment, it seemed that he had enough time to use that method of travel. He really didn’t like international Portkeys.

“I still don’t see why you have to go, Grandpa,” a young voice said. “Rwanda was bad enough. Shouldn’t Dumbledore be able to handle his own bloomin’ country?”

Grayson’s granddaughter, Kylie, was an extremely gifted young witch at the start of her professional career, easily the mostly likely in the family to follow in Edward’s footsteps. This was all the more impressive because so much of traditional Australian magic was gender-specific that she had to learn most of it on her own rather than from her grandfather. And like any good granddaughter, she didn’t want to seem him go off on another dangerous mission.

“Dumbledore is a hundred and fourteen years old,” Edward told her. “He’s getting careless in his old age. He’s making mistakes. He really had no business fighting in East Africa, but he did anyway. This war could be the death of him if he doesn’t have good help.”

“And you almost got killed in East Africa, too. You didn’t have to join that task force. I know it’s for a good cause, but is it really a good idea for you to get mixed up in another war overseas.”

“Someone has to do it, Kylie. Who else could do it better? You know I’ve spent my whole life fighting oppression around the world. I’m one of the few wizards alive who’s considered Voldemort’s equal.”

“But you don’t even have the backing of the Ministry or the ICW this time.”

That was an oversimplification. Officially, Edward Grayson’s new position was Special Envoy to the British Ministry, and officially, neither the Australian Ministry nor the ICW was getting involved in an internal British matter. However, they were interested in apprehending La Pantera and any other foreign dark wizards who might show their faces there, and that meant tacit approval for an envoy who would de facto involve himself in the brewing civil war.

“You talk like that Voldemort person’s worse than Grindelwald,” she said.

“He is,” Edward said, to her surprise. “Not in scale—at least not yet—but in depravity. He’s deeper into dark magic than anyone I’ve ever heard of. I probably shouldn’t even tell you, but…go to Uluru
and look in the Dark Magic section of the library for something called a horcrux, and then keep in mind that Voldemort made seven of them. And if that weren’t enough, he has allies now. There could be a lot of bloodshed if we don’t stop him soon.”

Kylie sighed and stepped forward and hugged him. “I’m gonna worry about you, Grandpa,” she said. “All of us are.”

“I know, my little Wallaby,” he said, patting her on the back, “but I can take care of myself. I need you to stay strong. You’ve got work to do here, too.”

She looked up at him in confusion. “Work to do here?” she said.

“That’s right. There’s a job to be done here at home, and I’d feel a lot better about it if you were in charge of it.”

“What job? Things are going pretty smooth around here.”

“Yes, that’s exactly the point.” Edward paused for a moment to label the final boxes, idly swishing his wand, marking them, Deliver to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Scotland, c/o Albus Dumbledore. The movers would be here in a few hours to ship them. As for the rest of the house, he left instructions for the caretaker to maintain it and for the groundskeeper to tend the animals, as he had last year. “You should keep the Tasmanian tigers with you, like last year,” he told Kylie. “They don’t do as well on their own.” She nodded. “Now, did I ever tell you how things were during the last British civil war?” he asked.

“You’ve said a lot over the years. I’m not sure which part you’re getting at,” Kylie said.

“Over there, things were really bad,” he told her. “Muggle-borns were being killed regularly. Anyone who spoke out was a target. The British Ministry was on the verge of collapse, and people were afraid of what would happen next. A lot them left the country.”

Grayson surveyed the wilderness outside his manor—the wilderness of his homeland. He would miss it. He’d loved it from his youth and had all but learnt every hill and valley. It ran in his blood. And he also knew how much it meant to the refugees he had welcomed to the country when he was Minister.

“Do you know,” he said, “that over in Britain, when people leave to get away from trouble, they don’t say they’re going to Canada; they don’t say they’re going to South Africa; they don’t say they’re going to India. They say they’re going to Australia. That’s not because we’re as far and out of the way as possible. If that were it, they’d be better off in New Zealand. It’s because, during the last war, we offered sanctuary to refugees from Britain, especially muggle-borns. I’ve been talking to Minister Hitchcock, and he’s agreed that now that Voldemort’s back, we’re going to do it again. This was never just Britain’s war, no matter how much the ICW wanted it to be. We were involved from the start, and somebody is going to need to keep the home front running smoothly.”

Kylie’s lips parted slightly, and she stared at her grandfather as she considered his words. “Keep the home front…” she said. “I get the feeling there’s more to it than that, Grandpa.” Grandpa knew how gifted she was. It didn’t take a powerful handpicked leader to tend to a bunch of refugees. Therefore, he had something more in mind.

“Very good, Wallaby,” Edward said with a smile. “You’ve been paying attention. It’s more than just refugees during. In the last war, we took in fighters from both sides—were followers of Dumbledore with a price on their heads and followers of Voldemort who wanted out—not many, but some. When I was Minister, I made it my policy to find them and question them—again, on both sides, but
especially the Death Eaters. It wasn’t easy, I’ll tell you. We had to find them in the crowd, and a lot of them went to a lot of trouble to hide, but I had good people rooting them out. It’s a tall order, but I think you can handle it.”

Kylie stood taller and more determinedly: “I think I can do that. What information are you going to need?”

“Anything you can get. In the last war, I wanted to know exactly what was going on in case it went international, and I wanted to give what little help I could to Dumbledore and the British Ministry. This time, we know it’s going international. It might not leave Europe, but it could at any time. I need any intel on Voldemort’s plans you can wring out of them.”

“You’re talking about de facto involving ourselves directly, and not just through the ICW,” she reasoned. “That’s a bold move.”

“Officially, we’re protecting our own personnel.”

“Meaning you.”

“Pretty much yes. You know the ICW’s mission: apprehend La Pantera. If Voldemort doesn’t like it, that’s his business.”

“Except that he won’t like, and he will make it our business no matter what we say. So by sending that mission, the ICW is effectively saying it’s intervening in the fight. I am paying attention to geopolitics, you know. They’re practically daring Voldemort to make this an international conflict, and this move says you’re not going freelance like you did in East Africa…you’re behind the whole thing, aren’t you?”

Edward smiled and patted her on the shoulder. He surveyed the sitting room one last time. “I definitely had some influence on it,” he said. “That’s the last box. Let’s go take a walk.”

The typical temperature in Sydney in July was around fifteen degrees Celsius, but the sun was out today, and it staved off the slight winter nip. Edward and Kylie started on a circuit around the colourful garden of the manor, magically enhanced to be in full bloom year-round. After admiring the view for a few minutes, Edward spoke again: “Your a very bright girl, Kylie. Don’t ever think I believed otherwise. The big unknown here is whether Voldemort will take the dare to shield his ally. From what I can gather, he doesn’t play well with others.”

“Except if allies like you join Dumbledore, Voldemort might decide he still needs her,” Kylie said, starting to get the picture. “So you going makes it more likely for this to go international.”

“It makes it more likely for the ICW to have the political justification to send a full peacekeeping force and hopefully end the war quickly,” her grandfather clarified. “But I’m afraid. Voldemort would rather it did for now, but I’m sure he’d make a move on the Continent once he solidified his control of Britain, and by then, he’ll be a lot harder to dislodge. But I talked it over with Dumbledore, and we think if we can mobilise an ICW peacekeeping force before he’s prepared, we can put him down before he causes too much trouble…Of course, that does mean if it backfires, it’ll do so much more spectacularly.”

Kylie muttered a short chant under her breath that was a supplication to the Rainbow Serpent for aid, roughly the same as Europeans would say “Merlin help us.” “Do you think this could turn into another Grindewald’s War, Grandpa?”

“No,” he replied firmly. “No, I don’t. The world isn’t the same as it was in 1939. There aren’t big,
international conflicts in the muggle world for Voldemort to play off of—certainly not in Europe. America is the only dominant power in the muggle world. But it could get very bad—much worse than in the seventies—if Voldemort really gets dug in and decides to do what Jugashvili did in the Caucasus—ignite a wave of terrorist violence in the muggle world, sweeping out of the Balkans or perhaps from North Africa and across Europe. If he tries that, it could make the Troubles in Ireland look like a barbie, and we could even be looking at muggle military intervention into those regions.”

“Which could easily involve the Australian muggle government,” Kylie reasoned shrewdly.

“You see where this is going. The Americans, too. It won’t be another Grindelwald’s War, but it could be the Caucasus all across Europe. That’s what we’re trying to stop. That’s why I have to go.”

“You’re right,” Kylie agreed quickly, leaning in to hug him again. “You’re right, Grandpa. You know we’ll still worry about you, though.”

“I know, Wallaby.”

“You realise you’re basically baiting Voldemort with yourself as the bait.”

“The thought crossed my mind, yes. I won’t insult you by pretending it’s all perfectly safe, but you know I can take care of myself. Frankly, at this point, I suspect I can take care of myself better than Dumbledore can. Just remember, I’m doing this for you—for you and for Australia.

“Now, back to the refugees, there’s something more you should know. If this goes worldwide, you can be sure Voldemort will have agents worldwide. They’re going to try to cause trouble here. And that’s what I really need your help for…If we’re going to make this nation a sanctuary, we’ll have to defend our shores from Death Eaters seeking revenge…You will have to defend them. Minister Hitchcock has agreed to form a new Defence Committee in the Home Department. I asked him to put you in charge of it, if you’ll take the position.”

“What? Me?” Kylie said in shock. “That’s—I mean, I’m only twenty-four. Surely, there are more qualified witches and wizards.”

“Not many. And you’re the same age I was in 1940, when my father put me in the same position during Grindelwald’s War.”

Yes, she remembered that from her grandfather’s stories. Still, it wasn’t the kind of job she was ever expecting to have. “I don’t know much about that kind of thing,” she said.

“Then surround yourself with trustworthy people who do. I know you can do it. You’re bright, capable, magically talented, and you love this country as much as I do. I trust you with this.”

“Wow, I…thank you, Grandpa, but…when does Hitchcock need an answer?”

“Preferably within a week. If something comes up, we can stretch it till the end of August, but come the first of September, Dumbledore wants to have all players in place, and I agree with him.”

“The start of the school year.”

“Right. For obvious reasons.”

“Okay, then, I’ll think it over, talk to Mum and Dad, probably, and I’ll tell Hitchcock by next weekend…either way, I’m glad you think so highly of me.”

“Just give it your full consideration. That’s all I ask. Well…I think that’s it. I need to leave now if I
want to make New Guinea by nightfall.”

“Mind if I come with you to the Torres Straight, Grandpa?” Kylie asked.

Edward smiled: “I would like that very much, Wallaby.”

They walked up the nearby hill out of sight of the muggles and began to sing the chants for the songline that followed the eastern coast. They chanted in a kind of counterpoint, since large parts of the songline had different men’s and women’s parts, and even though no words could be exchanged for most of those hundreds of miles, they both still counted it as quality bonding time.
Shall We Gather at the River?

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The Mayan prophecy says: all power to JK Rowling.

Mouth of the Río Ulúa, Honduras, Oxwitik Cooperative

31 July 1995

In most places, it was not usual for a riverboat to appear on the ocean. It was even less usual for it to appear out of thin air with a loud bang. It was less usual still for nine of them to do the same thing in the space of a few minutes. But the few locals in the area would never notice this because they had suddenly been inundated by a freak thunderstorm—a thunderstorm that struck every year without fail on the thirty-first of July, at eleven o’clock in the morning on the dot, and always ended at eleven twenty-two, like clockwork.

When the storm clouds cleared, nine old-fashioned paddle wheel boats flying the flags of eight Central American and Caribbean nations and one United States Territory converged on the estuary and began steaming their way up the Río Ulúa. The area was sparsely populated, dotted with stands of palm trees and mangroves and stretches of farmland here and there. There would be more people upriver—more farmland and the occasional town until they got into the more forested and mountainous regions of Honduras—but for some reason, people never seemed to look that closely at the nine boats that sailed up the river every year the day before the school term started throughout much of Central America. If they did, they might have thought it was a bit odd that boats from nine countries should sail together, or that each boat was marked with a crest that looked like a resplendent quetzal in mid-flight and the words Escuela Oxwitik, or that each seemed to be carrying several dozen schoolchildren and only a couple of adults, all dressed in rather unusual clothes.

Another oddity about these boats: as soon as they got close enough to one another, they lashed together corner to corner and began extending gangplanks from one to the next—which was unwieldy because of the paddle-wheels, but they did it anyway—forming a network that allowed anyone to walk from one end of the convoy to the other, which is just what many of the children started doing—walking up and down the length of the boats to catch up with their friends.

One boy named Pakal Ahaual stepped off the largest of the riverboats, the one from Guatemala, walking down through the convoy to the next smaller one, from Cuba. Pakal felt conflicted this year. The mood in his home country was lighter than it had been in some ways this summer. They had been given reprieve from a very worrying threat up north. But lesser bad actors had been making up the difference and somehow causing more racial strife than there had been before.

He tried to ignore the thought and scanned the deck until he spotted a short, black boy on the second boat and waved to him, calling, “César! Yo, César!”

“Hola, Pakal!” César called back, dashing over to the gangplank. “What’s up, man? How was your summer?”

“Ugh. Complicated.” Pakal said. “So how are you? I see you managed to escape the dark island once again.”
“Oh, come off it, bro, it’s only the muggles who are trying to stop us from leaving, and there’s only, like, five of them who know about us in the first place.”

Pakal’s best friend, César Corrales, hailed from Cuba, which was one of the few countries where the magical and muggle governments were not on good terms with each other, even by the lax standards of wizards. Purebloods like him mostly shrugged it off, though.

“Fine. Fine. Your summer was good, then?”

“Yeah. We went down to Machu Picchu for a week.”

“You went to another school?” Pakal said.

“Not the school: the town—the one by the old ruins. You should see it. It’s loco, how they do it. The one side of the place is crawling with muggles, and we’re right there on the other side of the mountain, doing magic and everything. They still use the ruins for their astronomical rituals, too.”

“Well, sure. They still use our pyramids, and those are six hundred years older,” Pakal said, but he immediately felt self-conscious. Pakal was almost pure Mayan blood, but it wasn’t a fact that he like to advertise at school, still less that his family still followed the old Mayan traditions. It garnered a few too many suspicious looks these days. “Hey, have you seen Idania yet?” he changed the subject.

“No, she’s probably still back with the other Nicaraguans.”

“Let’s go find her before she blows something up.” He took off astern, barely taking the time to wave to his other Cuban acquaintances and practically jumping from the one boat to the next.

The nine boats in the convoy were all furnished with the same old Spanish and Mesoamerican decor, despite the overall “Mississippi riverboat” look and were arranged from the largest, Guatemala, with more than a hundred students on board, in the front, to the smallest, Panama, with only twenty-five, in the rear, giving the whole thing a surprisingly unified appearance. The Nicaraguan contingent was in the middle of the pack, but it turned out that Idania had already started looking for them, because almost as soon as they crossed that next gangplank, there she was, right in front of them.

And both boys stared a little.

At thirteen, Idania Amador was already regarded as one of the prettiest girls in her year, and after a summer away, made up for the first day of school, and wearing a new summer dress, that assessment could only improve, which meant that even her two closest male friends were stuck staring long enough for her to run up to them and giggle at their predicament.

“Um, hola, Idania,” Pakal recovered. “Y—you look…”

“Candente,” César said unabashedly.

Idania giggled again: “Muchas gracias, boys. You didn’t get in too much trouble without me this summer, did you?”

“Ha. I don’t think it’s possible for us to get in more trouble than you, Idania,” César replied.

“I was mostly trying to avoid it,” Pakal said more softly.

“Well, I had an excellent summer,” Idania said. “Padre y Madre finally let start tutoring in duelling. My instructor says I might be able to go to the Junior North American Open next year.”
“¡Dios mío!” César said. “As if you’re not scary enough already.”

Idania laughed: “Oh, you didn’t think you could avoid it, did you? You knew I wanted to learn. I’m not sure how we’ll work it into our schedule, though. Padre y Madre will be campaigning in the muggle world next summer. You know how it is.”

Idania may have been a budding natural beauty, but she was a challenge for the boys to keep up with. Not only was she a first-rate troublemaker, but she also generated more controversy than most of her classmates put together, not least because of her friendship with César. Most wizards in Cuba opposed the muggle government for its attempts to control the magical population, and Idania’s parents, though magical, were dyed-in-the-wool Sandinistas—the now-out of power democratic socialists with close ties to the Cuban communists. It was no surprise that, as a traditional Maya, Pakal was thick with his fellow misfits by the end of their first year.

César merely rolled his eyes at her pronouncement, but Pakal was willing to take an interest in her politics. “Oh?” he asked. “Any better prospects than last time?”

“No, not really, unfortunately, but we’re going to keep up the good fight. Anyway, what about your summers? You boys do anything interesting?”

Pakal opened his mouth to respond, but he was interrupted by shouting coming from back up the convoy.

“There he is!”

“Hey! Hey! There you are, Ahaual!”

Pakal groaned. It was the same group of Ladinos from the Guatemalan boat who were being jerks to him and the other Maya for the whole trip.

“Ahaual, we’ve got something to say to you if you’re done sacrificing to Itzamna,” the leader said. He was a particularly angry-looking boy whom Pakal recognised by his face, but didn’t remember his name.

“All hail Itzamna! All hail Itzamna!” the boy’s friends mocked with ominous voices, waving their hands as if it were some dark Druidic chant.

Pakal fought the urge to hex the hecklers. He’d already been trying to evade them all morning. “That’s not even an insult, idiotas!” he yelled back.

“Not to you!” they said.

“Will you three just lay off?” he said.

“Hey, you don’t get to talk to us like that after this summer!” the leader of the pack said, stepping forward. “I’m surprised you even showed up. You decided to come back to school now that your mistress is gone?”

“La Pantera is not my mistress,” Pakal growled. “I hate what she’s doing, and I’m glad to see the back of her.”

“Her back-side, you mean,” one of them sneered, sparking a round of laughter.

Idania jumped in front of her friend: “Ew! That’s just gross!”
“No, man, I heard she’s into women,” the third one said. “Better watch out, chica. Your friend there might get a bonus for bringing you in.”

Pakal fumed. That was over the line.

Of course, Idania could take care of herself. Holding one hand out to hold Pakal back, she drew her wand and said, “You’d better watch out, niño. I might have to call you out for duelling practice.”

“You stay out of this, Amador!” the leader snapped and got right up Pakal’s face. “This is between us and Ahaual.”

Pakal really didn’t want his friends getting into this fight, so he stepped out from behind Idania. “Look, I don’t want any trouble,” he said.

“Bit late for that, isn’t it? Your kind’s been causing a us lot of trouble.”

Cortez. That was his name.

“They’re not my kind,” Pakal insisted, his voice rising. “They’re a few nuts who try to speak for us when they’re not even Maya. They’re Aztec.”

“Are they? The bastards who took our freaking dog last month didn’t sacrifice him to Tezcatlipoca. They sacrificed him to Itzamna. You know my dad’s been one of the people pushing the Ministry needs to do something about the Dark Lady? The Ministry your kind runs? You know they told Padre to shut up, or my little sister would be next? Huh?!?”

The younger boy held up his hands and took a step back from the irate fifth-year. His hands were shaking. “Look, I'm sorry about your dog, but we don’t do that. We farm our own animals, we haven’t done human sacrifice in three hundred years.”

“Liar!” Cortez yelled.

“And we don’t support La Pantera!” Of course, he couldn’t include his extended family in that. Embarrassingly, he knew he had a cousin or two who was in the Dark Lady’s camp.

“You guys leave him alone!” César said. Both he and Idania both had their wands out now and looked to be about to start hexing.

“Out of our way, chicos—” Cortez and his friends stomped forward, wands drawn.

Spells flew. César was flat on his back almost immediately. Idania stood her ground, but she was soon buckling under a more experienced opponent. Cortez fired off hexes at Pakal.

CRACK! In a burst of uncontrolled magic, a sudden wind blew and knocked Cortez over. Pakal looked down at his wand in surprise. Had he done that?

The other boys turned on him.

“Protego! Leave us alone!” he screamed. “I am not a follower of Meztli Ocelotl La Pantera de Veracruz, Itzamna damn her to Xibalba! So back off!”

The gang of Ladinos gasped, and everyone in earshot felt silent. Unlike Voldemort, La Pantera actually wanted people to use her assumed name. And also unlike Voldemort, there was no dark superstition regarding her true name. It was just that everyone knew that she took personal offence to anyone who didn’t use her chosen title. Arguably, Pakal had called her by an acceptable formal
mode of address, but the epithet he added would it cancel out.

“You’re insane!” Cortez yelled.

“Or a double agent!” one of his friends said.

“Come on, better avoid him,” the third said. “There no telling what he could do.” The older boys fled, no doubt to spread the word.

“Huh, I didn’t think that would work,” Pakal said once they walked away. He turned to see his two best friends staring at him in horror.

“Uh…Pakal, buddy…I know you don’t like That Woman,” César said, “but cursing her to the heavens is a really bad idea.”

“Yeah,” Idania added. “I’m sure everyone will know by the time we get to school.”

“I know, I know,” he groaned. “I just couldn’t take it anymore. And it’s not exactly a secret that my family is against her. It’s been like this all summer at home. Everyone stares like they’re scared of us, especially ones like us who follow the old rites. We almost have to take a side. And worse, they mock our faith just because they’re scared we’re going dark or something. I mean, come on. You don’t see me making fun of Santiago or La Inmaculada Concepción, do you?”

“No, no we don’t. You’re always very respectful, Pakal,” Idania assured him. “But come on, let’s get out of here before a chaperon shows up.”

They walked off in the other direction, farther down the convoy, and kept going until they reached the stern of the small Panamanian boat.

“Well, that was exciting,” Idania said. “So how was summer, you two?”

César answered first, repeating his story of his trip to Machu Picchu for her.

“Wow, that sounds great,” she opined. “I wish we had more places like that in Nicaragua.”

“Trust me, it’s not all it’s cracked up to be,” Pakal countered.

“You shouldn’t be ashamed of your heritage,” she said.

“I’m not ashamed of my heritage!” he snapped. “I ashamed of what some people are doing with it, like those idiotas. Really! Human sacrifices? We don’t need to go back to those days. It’s the twentieth damn century. We’re better than that. But some of my people can’t see that, and then some of the Ladinos can’t see that we’re not all like that—no offence.” He took a deep breath as he came off his rant.

His friends just stared at him.

Finally, Idania said, “Do you feel better now?”

He took another deep breath. “Yeah, better,” he said. “Itzamna, I missed you guys.” It had been so hard the last few years. La Pantera was more of a standard crime boss than most dark lords and ladies, but everyone knew she had it in her mind to unite all of the old Mesoamerican witches and wizards—which included all of Guatemala and Belize and the southern half of Mexico—under the banner of the old ways. And that put a big wedge between the Maya and Aztecs and the Latino, Ladino, and otherwise Spanish-descended wizards even though many of the ethnic pueblos
indígenas were against her, and between the recruiting and the threats, her influence in both groups seemed to grow year by year. And traditionalists like Pakal bore the brunt of it.

“It’s still rough at home, then?” César asked.

“Depends who you ask. In some ways, it’s not as bad as it was.” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “We’ve had a break there this past year because La Pantera’s out of the country. But it’s got worse, too, because our Ministry decided to go after her organisation while she’s away, and they’re fighting back.”

“It’s weird, isn’t it?” said César. “She disappears from Veracruz for months, and the next anyone hears of her, she’s in England working with that other dark wizard—Señor Vuelodelamuerte, I think.”

“I’m pretty sure he calls himself Lord Voldemort,” Idania said disdainfully. “‘Lord.’ Why do they always call themselves Lords and Ladies? Wannabee aristocrats, the lot of them. Hmpf, I guess I should be glad there aren’t so many democratic socialist dark wizards to make us look bad.”

“They probably want to sound more important,” César suggested.

“They don’t all,” Pakal said in a small voice. Both of his friends looked to him in surprise. This wasn’t a topic he liked to talk about much. “They don’t all call themselves lords and ladies. La Pantera actually goes by Sacerdotista Pantera—the Jaguar Priestess. The ‘Dark Lady’ bit was something they came up with in the States.”

“I didn’t know that,” Idania said.

“Not many people call her that besides her followers,” he said. “She’s not a priestess of any religion respectable people follow. That’s why most people just say La Pantera.”

“Huh. I wonder what’s gonna happen in Britain now that they’ve teamed up.”

“I don’t care. I’m just glad to get her away from us, and it’d be great if she took her followers with her.”

“That’s not very nice,” Idania huffed. “They’re gonna be in as much trouble as your people were.”

“It’s not that bad for Britain, is it?” asked César. “They’ve got Albus Dumbledore, don’t they? He won Grindelwald’s War practically single-handed.”

“Dumbledore?” Idania said. “I don’t know. He’s gotta be getting really old by now.”

“I don’t think Voldemort’s exactly a spring chicken, either,” Pakal said. “Didn’t he first show up in, like, the sixties? I dunno. My magical world history isn’t great.”

“Yeah, I think that’s right. And Dumbledore’s not alone either,” César added. “He’s got Harry Potter, and he won that tournament and killed a basilisk and a bunch of other stuff. And Grayson from Australia’s been hanging around there.”

“That’ll help them, but it’s still gonna be bad for them. Everybody’s saying it,” Idania said.

“Well, I hope Dumbledore and Grayson and Potter and whoever else they’ve got get both of them,” Pakal said. “I just don’t want her to come back. Of course, she’s obviously prepared to be away for a while, the way her supporters are carrying on without her.”
“Alright, but you should chill, Pakal,” Idania said. “Come on, we’re going back to school, and most of us aren’t into Guatemalan politics. You can get a break from all that mess.”

“Yeah, I know—mostly. I just wish there was some way I could convince people I’m not like them.”

“Pakal, you can’t do anything more than what you’re already doing. You already stand up and show everyone that there’s a better way. You’re nice and considerate to people on general principle, you help them when they ask for it, and you don’t call down curses on people you don’t like—usually. You’re living proof that you can follow the old Mayan religion and not be dark.”

Pakal and César stopped and stared at her.

“Okay, that was a little scary,” César said. “Who are you, and what have you done with our daughter of La Revolución?”

Idania sighed dramatically. “Hey, I can be sensitive when I want to be,” she sniffed. “La hija de La Revolución is still here, but I told you a long time ago that Padre y Madre mellowed out after we lost the last election. They’ve told me, the best thing you can do is to take a stand and prove that you’re better than the other side—that you can be strong without resorting to their wicked tactics…also, that’s what Padre said to Madre when Haiti beat Nicaragua in the last Quidditch match and blatantly cheated!” She yelled the last two words.

Both of her friends laughed.

Pakal smiled and wrapped an arm around each of their shoulders again. “You know,” he said, “I think it’s going to be alright this year.”
In (Post-)Soviet Russia...

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: In Soviet Russia, JK Rowling reads you!

Grozny, Chechnya, Russian Federation

13 August 1995

Donduk Kuvezin took his seat in the back of the pub in one of the quieter parts of the city, sitting with his back to the wall and making sure he was able to look along the long axis of the building. Things had been a lot quieter in this city ever since the muggle Russian army captured it in February, but things didn’t always follow each other between the magical world and the muggle world, and everyone knew that the agents of Konstantin Jugashvili were still on the move, preparing for another separatist assault—maybe not for a year yet, but it would be coming.

Donduk was waiting for his regular contact to come in. He was late today, which usually meant news, usually bad, and the longer it took, the more worried he became that they would both be found out. This was a dangerous game, even what little he was trying to do. Everything was when Konstantin Jugashvili was involved.

He wasn’t there to kill Jugashvili. That would be a fool’s errand. The man may have been disgraced and exiled, but he was still powerful on the level of an Edward Grayson or a Lord Voldemort. Not only that, but he had mastered the Tuvans’ and the other Siberian tribes’ secrets of clairvoyant scrying, and he had studied enough in the Far East that he was expert at moving about unseen. No one he didn’t trust could get close enough to kill him.

No, Donduk’s mission was one of intelligence gathering alone. There wasn’t even an action plan in the works, but his elders back home in Tuva were very interested in keeping tabs on Jugashvili’s movements, and they offered great incentives to young witches and wizards who were willing to go to Chechnya for a year to try to monitor him.

He had only so much as seen the man once. Once the hero of the magical Red Army in Grindelwald’s war, he had changed since. He was a hard-faced, grey-bearded man weighed down by years of fighting, no longer a fresh-faced soldier. But anyone who mistook that jaded hardness for weariness and vulnerability would not live to regret it. He was strong, and he was a man who was in it for the long haul.

Donduk’s contact was a man much like himself. He knew him only by the nom de guerre Yakov the Red, but he knew he was a wizard of the Udmurt Republic in the Western Urals—not actually part of Siberia, but his people had been similarly exploited by Jugashvili, their unique traditions stolen and used against them. He had bright red hair, as did many in Udmurtia, but he passed himself off convincingly as a man from Saint Petersburg. Unlike Donduk, he had been deep in this game for years. Donduk didn’t even have a code name, to say nothing of trying to pass for an ethnicity that was above suspicion to Jugashvili’s people. Yakov the Red was quite possibly taking a greater risk than usual by working with him, so he was having to earn his keep to make it worth the trouble.

He flicked his eyes up from the book he was half-reading each time the door opened. Eventually, his
vigilance paid off when Yakov the Red walked into the pub. His cover wasn’t impenetrable, but it was good. The red-headed man was dressed just the same as any other Russian wizard from the more cosmopolitan parts of the country, with just enough eccentricities so that he didn’t come across as some kind of golem—a hat cocked at an odd angle as if trying to look a little bit distinctive, a pair of green shoes that didn’t quite match his robes, as if he were a bit cheap or lazy—little things like that. He looked so ordinary that if Donduk hadn’t known him by his face, he never would have noticed how ordinary he looked.

Yakov bought a beer, then scanned the pub and pretended to see the man with the book for the first time. He walked up to the table casually, facing cater-cornered to him, and said, “Tolstoy, eh? You seem more like a Dostoevsky man, by the look of you.”

“How do I still count as one if I get tired of rereading him after a while?” Donduk replied with the correct, if inane code phrase.

“I don’t know. It sounds like a compromise to me.” Yakov the Red sat down with a flourish that allowed him to look over the whole pub discreetly. Leaning close and inhaling the scent of his mediocre beer deeply, he said softly, “You said there was a man from Yakutsk coming soon. Where is he?”

“She, actually, and I’m pretty sure she got held up in Kazakhstan,” Donduk replied, putting his book down. “I can scry for her tonight if you want.”

“Fine. Just as long as a certain dark wizard doesn’t catch on,” Yakov warned.

“No system is perfect; you know that. But the odds against a third party tapping into a scrying trance are astronomical if they aren’t looking for it. And if he is, we’re dead anyway.”

“Fair enough. Do it. No astral messages, though. We made that mistake in ‘92.”

Normally, Donduk demurred to the more experienced spy, but in this case, the insinuation set his teeth on edge. “We made that mistake in ‘48, Mr. Yakov. The elders did not send a novice to help you.”

“Can’t be too careful when the Dark Lord of Leningrad is involved,” Yakov reminded him. Indeed, the spies never so much as called Jugashvili by his name aloud. It was probably safe, but you never knew if he had something like a short range Taboo Field around him produced by his diverse Shamanic learning that would catch you if he happened to walk by a block away. “Any news on your tails?” he asked.

Donduk hoped he meant the people he was tailing and not the people tailing him, whom he was pretty sure he had thrown off his scent. This was the work he had to do to make it worth confiding with Yakov. It was a dangerous game, and a very cerebral one—a game played in scrying as much as in more traditional spying—but he was still alive, which meant he had played it well so far. “No changes,” he reported. “Or not many. He is still recruiting, the same as before. Still training people and moving goods—magical and muggle. He’s moving more muggle weapons. There’s a rumour that he’s training wizards to use muggle weapons, but I’m still trying to confirm it.”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” Yakov said. “They’re fast, deadly, and they can be charmed silent, or near enough.”

“But why? I can jam a whole room full of them with one spell.”

“Don’t get cocky, kid. You’ve got to see them first. If a man with a gun gets the drop on you, you
won’t have time to shield.”

“I suppose not,” Donduk admitted. “That would explain one thing, though.”

Yakov’s eyebrows shot up, very interested: “What’s that?”

“He isn’t being as aggressive as he was last year. I told you that much already. I think after the muggles lost the city, he’s being more careful, making sure everything’s in position before striking back.”

“Including the muggle army?” Yakov reasoned. “That’s bad news if he’s got his hooks into them. And odd, considering what I’ve heard.”

“Oh?” Donduk said with interest. “And what have you heard?”

“I heard that he has received some foreign visitors.”

“Foreign? How foreign are we talking about?”

“Pretty foreign. British.”

“British?” That was news indeed. Someone like Jugashvili wouldn’t normally receive visitors from out of the country—or out of the former Soviet Union, to be more precise. And British? The British Ministry had always been firmly against him. So that could only mean—He gasped: “They’re from Volde—”

“Don’t say it!” Yakov hissed. “I don’t know what spies Lord V. has around here, but if they’re afraid to say his name in Britain, there’s probably a reason.”

“Sorry,” Donduk said, although from what he knew, scrying was so little practised in the West that there was very little chance of these envoys using anything like it. “Who are they?”

“Don’t know much yet. I saw two big, burly men. The first one had black hair, a moustache, and a thing for knives. His name was Macnair or something close to that. And his buddy’s even bigger, but blond—name of Rowle. I haven’t heard much more, but I did get a message from home saying they only came here after swinging through the Ural Mountains.”

Donduk knew the geography of magical Russia well enough, and there was only one thing of interest there. “The last giant community in Europe,” he said.

“Da. They were allies the last time Lord V. was making trouble. It’s only natural he’d seek them out again. But the Dark Lord of Leningrad is another story.”

“If I remember my history right, the last time Lord V. was powerful, the Dark Lord of Leningrad was still in power and didn’t want anything to do with the West.”

“But…?” Yakov asked.

It was a test, of course, Donduk realised—a test to make sure he was smart enough to keep up this job. And why not? The stakes had just gone up, hadn’t they? Of course, this particular question was an easy one: “But he’s got more practical since he’s been out of power. He’ll take any help for the Chechens he can get, no matter where it’s from.”

“Very good. Now, next question: what does he have that would make it worth Lord V.’s while?”

Another easy one: “Magical knowledge. A powerful scryer in the West, where they no practically
nothing of it? That could upset all of Western Europe... But he is busy here. He's devoting his resources and personal involvement to taking back Chechnya. Scrying gets a lot harder over those distances. Does Lord V. think he can get him to go to Britain and help him?"

Yakov gave him a look that said, You really ought to be able to figure this out on your own, kid.

"Nyet. He’s consulting the oracle."

"Da."

"Of course. He is powerful, but Lord V. doesn’t need power. He needs information. Our Dark Lord might make a few trips to Britain, but the important thing is that Lord V.’s people can come here to consult him."

"Now you see it,” Yakov confirmed. “And that’s one more line of aid that our Dark Lord has at his disposal, too.”

“Okay, so that’s the new game, then. Now, what do we do?”

“Same thing we’ve been doing: monitor, dig up all the dirty details, and document everything so we can send it to the ICW if he steps over what passes for their line.” He spat at the ICW’s sluggish responses. “Only now, we’ve got some extra players to keep an eye on—players with possible connections to the giants.”

Donduk suppressed a shudder. He’d heard stories about giants. Almost everyone in the wizarding world had. They had lost ninety percent of their already-struggling population in the last century since the muggles had finished exploring the frontiers of the world, but a wild giant was still feared in the wilder places like Siberia. “Giants,” he muttered. “That’s either very good or very bad.”

Yakov raised an eyebrow: “How so?"

“Bad because a bull giant is a match for the average dragon, and that’s the last thing we need here or in Britain. Good because going across international borders will get the ICW’s attention.”

Yakov smirked cynically. “Don’t count on that one,” he said. “Lord V. already has that Dark Lady from the Americas working for him, and the ICW’s only sent a small team to arrest her, and that’s it. Hell, it took months for them to act on Rwanda, and they were slaughtering muggles by the hundreds of thousands there. And besides, if we’re right about Lord V.’s plans, the ICW will probably intervene in Britain rather than bother with us here. We’re on our own, the same as we have been.”

“Fair enough. What’s our game plan, then?”

“We split up and watch the Brits along with his men. You find your Yakut contact and bring her up to speed on the situation—in person, naturally. We’ll have plenty for her to do when she gets here.”

The Yakut spy, Uruydaana Ukoeva, arrived two days later, fortunately not having had any catastrophic problems in Kazakhstan. Her assistance was definitely welcome, since the small group in Chechnya now had their work cut out for them. The Death Eaters, Macnair and Rowle, were watched carefully. Though they were big and intimidating (traits that were probably selected for their dealings with the giants), they were lying low here, and they were certainly going to great pains to ingratiate themselves with Jugashvili. Donduk was surprised that they could afford to make such big promises. Some of them would have to be deferred until Voldemort won his own war, but they were very intent on forging an alliance.
Of course, all of their observations had been sent up the chain to the Siberian Coalition, a somewhat misnamed alliance of non-ethnic Russians within Magical Russia that had long been a voice against the firm hand of the Russian Ministry. Their new observations would help build their case to the ICW. Not that their case was likely to get very far, but they wanted to have everything documented for the inevitable “we told you so.”

At first, the Death Eaters acted brazenly, apparently unaware that they were being spied upon. But Jugashvili must have informed them of the infiltration in Grozny because they soon became more circumspect. Still, they weren’t that hard to track. They had been accustomed to acting secretly during their previous war, but not quite in this way. They hid behind masks, but theirs was a guerrilla action, almost an open rebellion, not this true cloak and dagger stuff. Also, they were out of practice. As much as they were happy to be torturing muggles again, they’d grown soft from thirteen years of their quiet lives, and they were still learning to become the terrorists they once were again.

At least, that was the impression that Donduk got.

“Seems to me that Lord V. runs them pretty hard,” Uruydaana said at their next meeting. “He’s certainly whipping them back into shape fast, what with all the duelling practice they’re doing.” It was true. Macnair and Rowle spent an inordinate amount of time practising dark curses.

“Our intel says he was pretty mad at all his followers who denounced him after he apparently died,” Donduk told her.

“Which is interesting in itself,” said Yakov the Red. “He was dead. All the physical evidence was clear. He couldn’t have possibly survived that house exploding even if that Potter boy did. And yet, half of Britain was afraid he’d come back. He talked like they should have known he’d come back. So what did he know that his followers didn’t?”

“Hard to say,” Uruydaana answered. “As paranoid and megalomaniacal as Lord V. sounds, he might not have told anyone exactly what he did. He might have just asserted that he was immortal and expected everyone to believe him. The really surprising part is that he turned out to be right.”

“That’s bad for us,” Donduk said. “If he can come back from the dead himself, what’s to stop him from doing it for his followers, too—or his allies for that matter. I have no wish to face an enemy we can’t kill.”

“War always comes with risk,” Yakov said. “And even if the fight is hopeless, the true believer always goes down fighting.”

“If there’s no other choice, yes,” he shot back testily. “But I’d much rather win the fight. And if Lord V. has defied the First Law of Magic and come back from the dead—or even what must have been a near-fatal and crushing defeat—that’s still bad for everyone who isn’t on the side of tyrants, especially if he can replicate the feat.”

“If he can,” Uruydaana clarified.

“If he wants to,” Yakov added. “A man like Lord V. won’t throw out immortality like candy even if he could—fewer people who can challenge his reign that way. Now, I refuse to believe that he has broken the First Law of Magic. He must have some power in reserve somewhere to do this. Therefore, if Lord V. becomes a threat to us, the thing to do is help his enemies find that power and destroy it.”

“But how do we talk to his enemies without being noticed?” Uruydaana asked. “They’re all the way in Britain.”
A sly smile crossed Donduk’s face: “I think I have a way,” he said, pausing for drama. “Fan Tong.”

“Fan Tong?” the others said reverently. Fan Tong was considered the greatest Seer alive today, and very well studied in other branches of magic. Though very old, in her prime, she was considered the equal of Jugashvili himself.

“In my latest dispatch from home, they said there is a rumour—but a well-supported rumour—that Fan Tong is involving herself in Britain. There are roundabout channels—nothing perfectly secure, but safe enough—by which I believe I can get a message to her.”

“We would still need a useful message to send to them,” Yakov said.

“So?” Uruydaana said. “We keep doing what we’ve been doing, except now we have an actual objective. Tail the Death Eaters, and see if any talk of immortality comes up.”

Yakov considered this and shrugged: “Fair enough.”

Immortality, however, didn’t seem to be on the minds of the Death Eaters, and Jugashvili, so far as they could ascertain, never asked how Voldemort had returned from the dead. That in itself was interesting. Either he already knew or guessed how Voldemort did it, which was very possible, or he didn’t care. Maybe he had contingencies of his own, or maybe he took the lesson of history to heart that most dark lords died violently rather than of old age and was focused on that danger. Or maybe he had even foreseen how long he would live and wasn’t interested in doing anything about it until the time came closer, even though that was a dangerous way to live.

No, the more interesting chatter was the rumour that Jugashvili was laying plans to go to take a trip to Britain in person. Apparently, his scrying talents were needed more urgently than they had thought. His point of travel would be an excellent place to try to catch him if he didn’t see them coming, so the spies watched carefully to try to find out when and where he was making the move. That was when they ran into trouble.

Macnair and Rowle, the Death Eaters, were headed towards what seemed to be an abandoned muggle warehouse. Uruydaana was tailing them, cautiously, under an invisibility cloak, wary of any tricks. That wariness proved justified, when she reached the warehouse and saw no welcoming committee. Instead, Macnair spun around and shouted, “Homenum Revelio!”

“Stupefy!” she shouted back, not waiting to be revealed. Before she could blink, dark curses were flying at her at top speed. She fought back as she was trained, dodging and weaving and trying to find an opening for her own spells, but it was two on one, and the Death Eaters had no compunction about using lethal spells. She found herself spending most of her time shielding, and that was no way to win a fight.

Macnair tried to pin her against a wall and distract her with a hail of curses while Rowle flanked her. She tried to keep up her defence, but it was failing.

“Avada—!” the blond giant started. She tried to duck, but she didn’t have room to move.

But there was a flash of red light, and Rowle crumpled under a non-verbal Stunner from behind. He fell forward, revealing Donduk Kuvezin standing at the entrance of the warehouse with his wand out.

“Diffindo!” Macnair roared, slashing his wand back at him without hesitating.

“Protego!”
The fight was on again. Macnair was doing an admirable job duelling two opponents at once, holding them off by using darker curses than they were willing to use. The fight went on for several minutes. Macnair was on the defensive, but they couldn’t quite bring him down, until Uruydaana found an opening and got a spell through. A moment later, both Macnair and Rowle were both unconscious at their feet. The two spies stood over them, panting, covering them with their wands.

“Thanks,” Uruydaana said.

“No problem,” Donduk replied.

“Good timing.”

“Looks like it…So…What should we do with them?”

“Light footprint, remember?” Uruydaana replied. “There’s no time to interrogate them, and there are ways to detect Veritaserum. We need them alive and unsuspecting to get information from them…Obliviate!”
Shangri-La, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China

14 August 1995

An ancient witch in traditional Chinese robes, richly coloured and patterned with gold thread, sat dozing in a lounge chair overlooking the vale of Shangri-La. She had retired here years ago for a quieter life, but it was not to be. The trouble of the world had followed her here. She spent much of her days dozing in this way, but day or night, she never slept well anymore.

Fan Tong, the last Grand Sorceress of the Qing, breathed with a soft rasping sound as she slept, mouth open—the only outward indication that she was still alive. Her hair was long, but very thin. Her skin looked like cracked leather. It was hard to believe that she had once sent the Japanese wizards running in terror before her. In fact, at her age, it was hard to guess whether she could still cast magic at all.

But Fan Tong was no stranger to the touch of magic, even now. Even as she slept, the currents of time were swirling around her, and when they converged, she snapped awake and sat upright, and in a harsh voice, she gasped, “The tigers are gathering in the beehive!”

A worried young man rushed to her side as she slipped out of her trance, and she reached to him with trembling hands for support. A jewelled necklace that she wore at all times spoke in a clear voice, “The tigers are gathering in the beehive.” No true Seer could remember her prophecies, but there were ways around that, and the woman who was once the most celebrated Seer in all of Asia learnt that long ago.

A song pierced the air, heartbreakingly beautiful and infinitely soothing, sung by a golden phoenix, which spread her wings over the old woman. As the phoenix sang, she relaxed, her hands steadied, and her breathing slowed. She settled back into her lounge chair, though she was now wide awake.

“Are you alright, Grandmother?” the young man said—not her grandson, but her great-great-grandson—more than a century her junior and already a strong young man. One or more of Fan Tong’s descendants was always nearby as a caregiver, and Chang Jie was there frequently of late.

“Is that you, Jie Jie?” Fan Tong said in a rickety voice.

“Yes, Grandmother,” Chang Jie said. “That sounded like a difficult vision. ‘The tigers are gathering in the beehive.’ What does that mean?”

“The tigers are gathering in the beehive…” She trailed off foggily and got a vacant look on her face. Jie thought she might have forgotten what they were talking about, but she spoke up again: “I know of only one place that can be called ‘the beehive’: Dumbledore’s country.”

“Dumbledore. Britain,” Jie whispered. “My cousin, Cho, in Britain told me about the return of Lord
Voldemort in her letters. Do you remember, Grandmother?"

“Lord Voldemort?” Her gaze turned sharper again. “Yes, the vicious serpent, eight-headed, who
defies the Veil of Shadow—” She stopped short and shivered. It wasn’t uncommon for her to slip
into prophetic language in normal speech anymore. It would have helped if her prophecies were
more useful, though.

“It must be Dumbledore’s country,” Jie reasoned. “That is what made the prophecy so momentous.
It’s so far away. But who are the tigers?”

“The tigers?”

“You said the tigers were gathering. Who are they?”

“Tigers…It is strange. I do not understand.”

Jie knelt at her side and held her hand. “Can you See anything, Grandmother?”

“Perhaps…” Fan Tong closed her eyes and concentrated. A Seer could not control his or her true
prophecies, but one skilled in divination could dip into the magic and pull out useful information
about them—in theory, anyway. Age had worn her gift down, and her prophecies and predictions
had grown both more venial and more obfuscated over the years, even as they ironically increased in
frequency. Prophecies were often somewhat vague, but most didn’t rely on outright symbolism,
which made the interpretation of hers that much harder. Her Sight came in vague flashes and images
anymore, but she gathered her fading mental powers and tried her best to interpret them. “I See…”
she said, and flinched at the Sight. “Tigers…” She couldn’t See the animals clearly—just fur and
eyes and flashing claws. “A pack of tigers.”

“Tigers don’t hunt in packs,” Jie said.

“Unnatural…drawn together…” she said, still concentrating. “No, not tigers! Not tigers…”

“Lions, maybe?”

“No. Not lions…Jaguar…Tiger…Leopard…Lynx.” She gasped and opened her eyes, snapping out
of her Vision.

“Jaguar, tiger, leopard, lynx,” he repeated. “A jaguar and a leopard? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I could tell the difference.”

“So instead of tigers, then, four different cats from different parts of the world, together. Why?”

“I do not know. It is mysterious.”

“Hmm, typically, animals stand in for people—or sometimes places. The four cats represent four
different places. The jaguar—that’s the Americas; the tiger—Asia; the leopard—Africa; and the lynx
—Europe. All are solitary species, too, and yet all gathering in Britain—”

“Be cautious, Jie Jie,” the old woman reminded him. “You must beware of the danger of over-
interpreting.” The greatest danger for a Seer or any practitioner of divination, even more so than
ignoring a prophecy, was to read too much into one.

“My apologies, Grandmother,” he said. “But it does seem to suggest great powers gathering in
Britain—and not good ones.”
The golden phoenix trilled a note of concern, worried over the words she was hearing.

“Peace, Xihe,” Tong said. “Yes, it feel as if there is great evil moving in the world. Perhaps stronger techniques—The monks shall partake of the fruit of the kiwi tree!”

“The monks shall partake of the fruit of the kiwi tree,” her necklace repeated. She stopped and took a deep breath. That one, like most of her prophecies, didn’t wrack her body, not being important or momentous enough, but she still went stiff, and it was a strain on her voice. This happened practically every day, now—prophesying what was for dinner and the like. It drove the Chinese Bureau of Mysteries mad. Fan Tong produced more prophecies than all the other Seers in China put together, and most of them were completely worthless.

“Oh, I grow too old for this, Jie Jie,” she said. “I can’t even remember how many wars I’ve fought.”

“Grandmother, I did not mean—No one is asking you to fight,” Jie said with alarm.

“No, it is no use denying it. My dreams have troubled me of late.”

“Your—your dreams? You have not said anything about dreams.”

“I did not want to worry you, but I see I cannot ignore them. I foresee great trouble coming upon the world—great danger. I foresee death and destruction on a scale not seen since Grindelwald’s War, and Britain is at the centre.”

Chang Jie gasped, knowing how dire it was for his ancestor to say that. Fan Tong was already old when Grindelwald’s war broke out, but she had still fought like any Chinese patriot, and it was then, at the end of the war, that she scored her life’s greatest victory: her fifth and final duel with the great Japanese wizard, Abe no Yorimitsu. But finally killing the man who had defeated her four times had nearly ended her own life, and it was only with Xihe’s help that she made it out alive. She was not fit to fight again.

“You…you think that this prophecy is about a coming world war?” he whispered.

“War is coming, child. That much I know. It is there for all to see if you look closely. The tea leaves say it. The stars say it. The bones say it. I cannot but listen. I do not know how far it will spread, but it is coming…Still, I do not understand this vision. The connection of the cats is murky.”

“But to involve yourself in this…” Jie said, not really listening.

“The visions have come to me. I am already involved,” she interrupted.

“That does not mean that you must act, Grandmother. Perhaps there is no help that we can give.”

“The Visions would not come to me if I and mine could do nothing about them. You know this, Chang Jie. It is the greatest of the laws of prophecy.”

“My apologies, Grandmother.” It was a foolish suggestion, he realised. Prophecies were only useful if they came to those with the power to influence them. Any “Seer” who gave colourful descriptions of far-off lands or the distant future was a self-declared charlatan. Fan looked like her mind was made up about it, so he shifted back to reasoning things out. “It would seem then,” he said slowly, “that this prophecy ought to be connected with this war you have foreseen, if we could trust the normal rules of prophecies.”

“And yet, sadly, I cannot trust the normal rules anymore,” Fan Tong said. “My powers are not so great as they once were. No, I cannot interpret it. Not for certain. Perhaps Lo-Tsen will be able to
Lo-Tsen was not a young woman, but eighty-five was barely an age to retire for witches, and she was a spring chicken compared with Fan Tong. She had been the de facto leader of Shangri-La for many years, since the High Lama of the wizarding Buddhist community exercised no real temporal power. She had been a very beautiful woman in her youth and still looked very good, even by magical standards, but she had an air of command now that she had not had as a girl, and she was closely involved with the well-being of Fan Tong, the valley’s most famous resident. Naturally, she wanted to be informed of any major prophecies the ancient witch made.

“So the prophecy?” she asked. “It said, “The tigers are gathering in the beehive’?”

“Yes, Lo-Tsen,” Fan Tong told her. “I’ve kept the recording.”

“And you tried to scry for its meaning?”

“I did. I saw four cats, but only one was a tiger. The others were…”

“A jaguar, a leopard, and a lynx,” Chang Jie reminded her.

“Yes, that was it. I do not trust myself to interpret the prophecy, but I believe it has to do with the dark wizard in Britain. Perhaps if you know more about the situation…”

Lo-Tsen nodded: “I believe I can help. I know a little of the conflict in Britain. Lord Voldemort was not the only dark wizard sighted there. There was another, known as the Dark Lady of Veracruz. A Mexican. And her chosen name is the Jaguar Priestess.”

“The Jaguar,” Jie gasped softly. “If all of the cats represent dark wizards…”

“The lynx is found in Europe,” Fan Tong reasoned. “It could refer to Voldemort himself.”

“And it would stand to reason that the other two are an African and an Asian wizard of comparable power,” Lo-Tsen finished. “Xu Fu, four dark lords of that calibre in the same place? You are right; it could lead to a world war.”

“I see darkness in my dreams, Lo-Tsen,” the ancient witch said. “I see horrors such as I have never…the wild beasts and the piercing eye and the storm…storm…storm…the winds of ice lie at the edge of the roof of the hallows!”

“The winds of ice lie at the edge of the roof of the hallows,” the amulet repeated as Xihe crooned softly.

All three of them stared in surprise. She had not uttered that prophecy in Chinese.

“That was English,” Jie whispered.

“Yes,” Fan Tong said. “I should have seen it before. That was not the first time that has happened.”

“It wasn’t?”

“No. You see now why I fear I must go. Britain is coming to me. It will not leave me alone.”

“Fan Tong, if the signs say you must go to Britain we will give you all the help we can,” Lo-Tsen said.
“You are most kind, Lo-Tsen. I fear I may need it.”

“But what did the prophecy mean?” Jie said. “Edge of the roof of the Hallows? I don’t understand. Something about the Deathly Hallows of Western lore?”

“Perhaps. Let me think…” said Lo-Tsen. She was one of the best English speakers in the valley, but it still took her a couple minutes to catch the wordplay. “Eaves,” she concluded. “The edges of a roof are the eaves in English—the same sound as the word for ‘eve’. All Hallows’ Eve. She’s predicted a Halloween ice storm.”

“Oh,” Jie said, disappointed. “But what do we do about Britain?”

“There is little we can do if we do not know more about what’s happening,” Lo-Tsen said.

“We come back to the prophecy, then,” Fan Tong replied. “I believe action is needed. My dreams tell me that Britain will need our help.”

Lo-Tsen frowned. “I fear what will happen if you go immediately without a clear picture,” she said. “Unless we can gain more information through official channels, or if you can scry more reliable information…”

“Perhaps if you focus on the tiger,” Jie said. “If you scry for something closer to home, it may be clearer.”

Lo-Tsen brightened: “That may well work. If the tiger has to do with Asia, it may be easier.”

“The tiger…” Fan Tong said. That was the first animal she had focused on, but now, with a better idea of what she was looking for, she might be able to See more. She muttered under her breath and tried to focus again: “The tiger…where is the tiger…?”

She Saw disjointed flashes once more—a landscape, green and mountainous and isolated—ancient, blocky castles that she could only vaguely place in style—the tiger, stalking its prey. It turned and looked her in the eye—

“AHH!” She reeled back with a loud scream and froze with her mouth lolling open. For a moment, the others feared that her heart had given out, but then, she gasped for breath and began babbling incoherently.

“What is it? What happened, Grandmother?” Jie cried frantically.

The ancient witch kept shouting. Even Xihe’s song couldn’t calm her. “On uvidel menya! On uvidel menya!”

“What is she saying? What language is that?”

Lo-Tsen had turned pale. “It’s Russian,” she said. “She’s saying…she’s saying, “He saw me!’”

Jie Chang’s stared at both of them in horror. He had never heard of anyone detecting a scrying spell on them, let alone looking back along it. “Grandmother! Can you hear me? What do we do?”

Lo-Tsen collected herself and was all business at once: “Did you see who he was? Did he see where you were?”

“Don’t…don’t know…” Fan Tong stammered. “No…no reason to attack the vale. The action is not here.”
“I hope not, but we can’t afford an invasion, but did you see who it was?”

“Too long! Too long!” she moaned.

“She doesn’t remember,” said Jie. “Do you know any powerful wizards in Asia, Lo-Tsen? Someone it could have been?”

“C-castles,” Fan Tong whispered.

“Grandmother?”

“Saw… castles. Western-style. Mountains—green mountains. The man was… white—Westerner.”

“Green mountains, Western-style castles, the man was a Westerner?” Lo-Tsen reasoned. “A Russian. You were speaking Russian. And the mountains…it would have to be the Caucasus, wouldn’t it? Then the man would be—oh, dear.”

“What?” Jie said.

“Konstantin Jugashvili. I should have known. He’s an expert on Siberian shamanic magics—it would have been a Siberian tiger she saw. I could imagine him looking back into a vision.”

“How bad is it?”

“Not as bad as it could be. Jugashvili’s been expending most of his efforts in the Caucasus. Aiding Voldemort in Britain would strain his resources even further. He won’t want to try for a move here.”

“But he knows now that I’m on to him,” Fan Tong said. “I must act quickly.”

“What will you do, Grandmother?” asked Jie worriedly.

“I will go to Britain,” she said firmly.

“Jugashvili will expect you,” warned Lo-Tsen.

“He already expects me.”

“You cannot fight him.”

“I cannot fight him with force. But if he is aiding the Dark, the Light will need a Seer. I have not heard of momentous prophecies from Britain since the death of Cassandra Trelawney. I will serve.”

Chang Jie made up his mind: “Then I will go with you.”

Fan Tong turned to face him with surprise. “You will, Jie Jie?”

“My name is Chang Jie, Grandmother,” he said as respectfully as he could. “I am a son of the House of Chang and a grandson of the House of Fan. I cannot allow my honoured ancestor to face this evil alone. I will aid you. And I will contact my cousins in Britain. I am sure they will help as well.”

“Wait a minute,” Lo-Tsen interrupted. “We still can’t just dive into this. Shangri-La can’t afford a military conflict and a legal one at the same time, especially if Jugashvili is on to us. You know what the ICW will do to us if we insert ourselves into a foreign conflict without their approval.”

Fan Tong leaned back and steepled her fingers together. “You are right, Lo-Tsen,” she admitted. “This isn’t like it was last time… Well, there is only one thing we can do. Didn’t you say that the
ICW was sending someone to Britain?”

“Yes, a police mission to apprehend the Jaguar Priestess. Just a moment…” She opened a drawer in her desk and filed through some papers. “Here, it is.” She showed them a document written in French with the Chinese translation inserted between the lines.

“That is it. We must petition the ICW to join their police mission.”

“Do you think they’ll agree?”

“I think they will. I hope that my visions will be enough to convince them.”

“I will back you if you try, Madam Fan, but it’s a very limited mandate. They’re not to get involved in a civil conflict.”

“If my visions are right, they will not be able to avoid it,” Fan Tong retorted. “Please contact the ICW at once.”

“As you wish, ma’am.”
ICW Headquarters, Meiringen, Switzerland

21 August 1995

In a small, but strong and magically-hidden keep overlooking the Reichenbach Falls, the Headquarters of the International Confederation of Wizards was a bustle of activity, even when it wasn’t in session. When the delegates weren’t meeting, the bureaucrats ruled the roost, taking care of day-to-day activities. Applications for small things like the transfer of dangerous creatures across national borders as had been done for the Tetrawizard Tournament in Britain were approved with little more than a rubber stamp. Multinational trade agreements required a little more care. The constant petitions to allow importation of flying carpets into Western Europe were dutifully passed along with the full knowledge that the broomstick interests would never allow them to pass in their home countries, but others, like agreements on the protection of endangered magical creatures, had far better prospects.

At higher levels, reports were written and compiled regularly on more complex issues, particularly those that would come up at the annual meetings. Everything from yet another vote on whether to divide the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Magic to a plan for fighting the Ebola outbreak in Zaire started by Kinani Ngeze’s Nundu was carefully researched and sent off to the various delegates around the world for consideration.

It was to one of these bureaucrats, a local named Aegidus Tell, that two documents arrived from Shangri-La, both signed by Lo-Tsen, the Permanent Secretary to the High Lama, and countersigned by the famed Seer, Fan Tong, herself. Surprised at the mailings, he read them over carefully. The first one was confusing: an application for Fan Tong to join the police mission in Britain to apprehend the rogue dark lady, La Pantera.

Aegidus Tell was sure he was misremembering his history. Fan Tong had to be ancient by now. He didn’t even know she was still alive. He remembered reading a history of Grindelwald’s War that depicted the epic duels of Fan Tong and Abe no Yorimitsu in the Pacific Theatre—both grey-haired and old, relics of an earlier time, even then. Surely, there must be some mistake. But a quick consultation of a history book confirmed there wasn’t: Fan Tong, born 1860. He couldn’t believe she was still practising as a Seer, much less was in a condition to join an international law enforcement expedition.

He looked at the second memo, hoping to find more clues as to what was going on. What he found was far more alarming. It was an oracle—not an oracle as in a person, nor a true prophecy, but a prophetic message pieced together from half-understood prophecies, troubling, half-remembered dreams, and careful studies with divination—a piece of magical detective work as weighty as any prophecy, even with Fan Tong’s failing powers. The message was clear: a war was coming. And not just any war—a war in Western Europe—something rare in this day and age. And if a Seer all the way in China was Seeing it, it would be a war such as had not been seen since Grindelwald’s time.
Aegidus was sceptical of divination himself, but the current Supreme Mugwump had instituted strict rules regarding prophecies. All important prophecies from established Seers—and even from unestablished Seers if they could be substantiated—were to be passed along for him for review personally—no exceptions. That the kind of thing happened a few times a year. Doubtless, there were other important prophecies as well, but they were witnessed by people who either handled them internally in their homelands, didn’t think them important, or otherwise didn’t want to pass them up to the ICW level.

This was easily the most important oracle that had ever crossed Aegidus’s desk. What was more, he was well aware of Voldemort’s return and how close Britain’s civil war had come to spilling beyond its borders the last time he was strong. The spark was there for war to begin. *This* oracle looked all too believable. He sent it along to Albus Dumbledore with a priority stamp and then poured himself a stiff drink.

He thought about the message some more. This would require serious consideration. First question: supposing there was at least a war in Britain—and it didn’t take a Seer to see that coming—what were the odds that it would hit the Continent? Voldemort had recruited on the Continent last time, but he had not risked acting openly. But this time, he was already known to have foreign allies, and the ICW was taking action, albeit small so far. Bump those odds up to “definitely worrying.”

Second question: how much danger were they in here in Switzerland? Aegidus had his own family to think of. Grindelwald hadn’t tried attacking Switzerland, nor had the muggle Axis Powers. The land was too well protected by both her location and her extensive preparation to be worth it. True, Voldemort was widely considered to be much less sane than Grindelwald, but if he tried it, he would still be fighting (quite literally) an uphill battle.

Third question: how good were those national defences today, fifty years after the last major war in Europe? Magical Switzerland was unprepared for a war—by Swiss standards, anyway. Switzerland had begun preparing its defences against Grindelwald in earnest in 1935, and the muggle government had been anticipating the Great War as early as the 1880s. They might little time to improve upon them now if Voldemort was as mad as the rumours said.

On the other hand, the Cold War had done wonders for the legendary Swiss preparedness on the muggle side. Literally every person in Switzerland, magical and muggle, was within a few minutes of a nuclear fallout shelter.

It was that legendary Swiss preparedness that led him to act. The Swiss Ministry was no doubt watching Voldemort’s movements very carefully already, and they would definitely want to know about an oracle like this. So would the Liechtensteiner Minister, for that matter. Like the other so-called “European microstates,” Liechtenstein had been a sanctuary for wizards during the Inquisition, so that even today, it had as many wizards as Albania, which was a hundred times its size. (Predictably, it was a nightmare to enforce the Statute of Secrecy there.) But because of its geographic limitations, Liechtenstein partnered with Switzerland for national defence, so they would definitely have an interest.

And one final question: how would Dumbledore react to him telling his Ministry? Well, Dumbledore was being pretty open about the new war starting in Britain. Aegidus was technically going behind his back before the oracle was fully understood, but he didn’t think the Supreme Mugwump would much mind if more wizards on the side of the light were prepared for this.

That settled it. Aegidus grabbed some more parchment and started writing out two more letters.

Albus Dumbledore, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, among other
things, returned to Hogwarts after checking on the Order at the McKinnon House to find a stack of paperwork on his desk. Such was the plight of a powerful wizard, wartime or no. This time of year, most of his paperwork was from his Chief Warlock position, with some of it relating to beginning the new school year. However, he was surprised to find an ICW memo on top of the stack today. And when he saw what it was, he dropped everything else and paid close attention to it. A prophecy—no, not a prophecy—an oracle. That was even better. They usually had a few more useful specifics than prophecies.

Alas, the news was not good. He’d thought he’d already seen the worst, but apparently, he was wrong. The oracle—all the way from China, no less—predicted a war. Not just a little war this time, but a war possibly affecting all of Europe.

Of course, the signs were there already. Voldemort had La Pantera as an ally, and Albus’s intelligence reported that he was already reaching out to the Continent for recruiting. The ICW was sending a police mission to deal with La Pantera, which was inviting trouble, even if their mandate was narrow. He’d hoped he would be able to keep it contained, but this latest prediction suggested that his effort would fail.

The central thesis of the oracle was a prophecy by a powerful, if ailing, Seer: “The tigers are gathering in the beehive.” The beehive: Britain. Albus himself was himself the only bee he knew of worth prophesying about. The tigers: presumably dark wizards. There were already two here, and the prophecy implied more were coming.

The dreams that inspired the oracle were, if it were possible, even more troubling. Disjointed images of an all-seeing eye from which none could hide, wild beasts wreaking havoc across the land, devastating storms laying waste to cities. Albus didn’t know how much of the dreams could be taken literally, but efforts to divine the future hinted at battles for the ages in the magical world, and a disturbing amount of conflict in the muggle world. Even taken as a whole, the oracle was vague, but its warning was clear enough. War was indeed coming: war large enough to spill into the muggle world and possibly even threaten the Statute of Secrecy itself. In other words, much worse than last time.

“Merlin’s beard, I’m getting too old for this,” he muttered, sinking further into his seat.

The war in East Africa had taken a lot out of him—more than he had let on. Another full-scale war had been thrust upon him—one he’d never expected to fight—and he’d needed plenty of time to recover afterwards. It was good that it had lasted only a few months. If he hadn’t had to take a mandatory three-week vacation while he was in quarantine, he would have had a much harder time of it.

But when looked at the signature on the oracle again, the old Seer put him to shame. He was ‘only’ one hundred and fourteen. Fan Tong was a hundred and thirty-five. Fate didn’t care how old he was, and neither did Voldemort. He’d have to grin and bear it once again.

So what could he do in response to this? As Supreme Mugwump, it was his duty to take decisive action for the good of Britain and the ICW as a whole. If all of Europe was to be swept up in this war, all of Europe would need to be prepared. The fact that an oracle came from such a reputable source as Fan Tong would probably convince most of them to pay attention. The details would have to be kept close to the vest, but he would tell the Ministers and ICW representatives of the various European countries right away. They would need to start their own preparations. Given the way the Swiss Ministry operated, he suspected that the Swiss and Liechtensteiner Ministers already knew, so he should probably start with them.

The complicated part would be convincing the ICW to take more aggressive action, even with the
police mission. It had been like pulling teeth, as the muggles said, to get them to intervene in Rwanda, and this was a much bigger deal with multiple dark lords. Who was gathering? He wondered. Albus thought about every dark lord around the world he knew of and their magical specialities: The escaped Kinani Ngeze in Zaire, Caliph al-Ghilan in Iraq, the Mage Lord in Somalia, Jugashvili in Russia, Bochica Guatavita in Colombia, and whoever the Marshal of the Battle Mages of North Korea was this month seemed the most likely suspects. He’d be wise to draw up contingency plans for all of them if the oracle held true. Of course, it was the ones he didn’t know about who were most dangerous. Places of unrest like the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Horn of Africa were breeding grounds for dark wizards, and the ICW would do well to monitor them more closely.

As for Britain, he’d already begun most of the work that needed done already. Edward Grayson and young Harry Potter had done an admirable job of convincing Fudge of the truth when Albus had failed. Fudge had allowed him to send emissaries to the werewolves and giants. Granted, it looked like the Death Eaters had got to the giants first, but he had made some connections with some Siberian wizards who could prove very useful. Security was being raised at Hogwarts and elsewhere, and Voldemort himself had proved how futile it was keeping the dementors at Azkaban, albeit at a steep price.

And then, there was Harry.

This oracle certainly changed his perspective on him.

For the past fourteen years, Albus had been worried about Harry being thrust into the fight too early, and considering the boy had had to fight dark forces every year at Hogwarts so far, it was a valid concern. But now, he was more worried about this new war dragging on for year after year like the last one, with more nations than Britain suffering. And as for Harry, now he had to worry about keeping him alive long enough to join the fight after he graduated—maybe even after he completed Auror training. Not to mention the fact Harry was now prophesied to destroy only one of several dark lords to threaten Britain.

It all seemed mad. After Gellert’s war, both the magical and muggle governments of Europe had united in such a way that the prospect of another full-scale war in the West had seemed impossible for centuries to come. For all that his fellow British wizard feared to speak his name, Voldemort had been a mere civil war, hardly worthy of global attention.

But now, a Seer on the other side of the world was prophesying about it, and that was not a good sign. Fan Tong, all the way in China, thought that Voldemort was a problem—enough of a problem to come here herself…perhaps final problem for her. Given her age, there was every possibility she wouldn’t return home. Reading between the lines, he suspected she’d had a premonition about it, in fact. Her oracle gave vague allusions to her involvement, but nothing about her fate, not even possibilities. It wouldn’t be out of character for her if she was hiding that fact from her friends and family.

And with as old as he felt right now, Albus Dumbledore feared Voldemort would be the final problem for him, too.
Do Think About Elephants

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: JK Rowling owns Harry Potter from here to Timbuktu.

Note that this story differs from Pottermore’s descriptions of magical schools in Africa because I disagree with JK Rowling’s map of only 11 schools of magic in the world and, more importantly, because I wrote it before that writing was released. In the Animagus-Verse, the Uagadou School of Magic in Uganda serves only the Swahili-speaking nations of East Africa, while Al-Sahil serves the French-speaking nations, among others. Since the fanon version of (for example) the Wizengamot is already pretty AU, I don’t think this is much of a stretch.

(And why JKR chose to place a school whose name comes from historical Mali in Uganda, I have no idea.)

Al-Sahil School of Magic, Mali, Songhai

On the Niger River, midway from Timbuktu to Bamako

1 September 1995

A sandstorm swept towards Al-Sahil from the north. It was one of those sandstorms that always seemed to come on the same schedule, springing up from nowhere in a matter of minutes, swirling like a giant dust devil across the sand, and vanishing just as quickly, depositing a group of wizards in its wake—not that the muggles ever noticed.

This particular sandstorm was bringing a large group of local students—that is, mostly from within Mali, from the pickup point in Timbuktu. The swirl of sand surged forward until it stopped just outside the school gates and deposited its ‘passengers’ there, but more than just a mode of transport, it was a signpost visible from a great distance—a way for other groups of students to see how close they were to the school, and for some, to make sure they were on track.

The students at Al-Sahil came in different ways, some by train or boat or caravan. The more bookish students made a game out of spotting as many countries’ students arriving as possible as they approached, and a good deal more were scanning the horizon for the particular mode of transport of their friends from some country or other.

These eclectic methods of travel reflected the school itself. Al-Sahil School of Magic was a sprawling patchwork of buildings that had been enlarged three times by the French colonial wizards since its origins in the early Islamic period: once in 1885, once in 1908, and again in 1919. Today, at more than twice the size of Hogwarts, Al-Sahil was one of the largest schools of magic in the world. Its students came from everywhere from Mauritania to Madagascar, and they all seemed to come in different ways. Students from the drier countries, like Songhai and Mauritania, travelled by sandstorm. Those from the West African coast took a train in a complicated series of connections put in between the various colonial powers in the late 1800s. The Zairean students came riding a caravan of magical elephants, bred for centuries for use by wizards who were unsatisfied with the way their muggle cousins handled the noble beasts. And no one was quite sure how the Malagasy contingent
got there. They always just seemed to appear out of nowhere when you had your back turned. It was a little unsettling.

On the dry terrain, the riders of the elephant caravan from Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi could see a long way. The sandstorm was visible as a golden column in the distance, and the train was a black line on the horizon. A tall, thin, seventh-year girl on the back of an elephant near the rear of the caravan shielded her eyes and gazed out of the column of dust, trying to gauge its distance and direction.

“Was that the sandstorm from Timbuktu, Jacqueline?” she asked in heavily-accented French, turning to glance at her two year-mates riding behind her.

“How should I know?” the shortest of the three girls said. “I can never tell out here.”

The girl in front sighed. “I think we’re going to be late. How is Kimpa doing?”

“Are we there yet?” came the sleepy reply from the girl in question.

“Almost, Kimpa. I can see the school from here. We need to pick up the pace, though.”

“Don’t worry, Rosalie,” Kimpa assured her. “The caravan leaders know what they’re doing. We’ll get there.”

Rosalie just looked on nervously from her perch on the elephant’s neck, keeping an uneasy grip on her guiding pole.

Kimpa Muamba, Rosalie Mukasonga, and Jacqueline Rufyikiri had been nearly inseparable since their first year at Al-Sahil, and their bond had grown even closer as they supported each other through the East African War, constantly waiting and worrying to hear word of their families whilst trying to keep up with their studies. Kimpa was normally the one who drove the elephant for the three of them even since their fourth year, being by far the best at it, but she didn’t feel up to it this time. She had gone home from school last June only to be nearly die of the Ebola virus that was still ravaging Zaire. The outbreak that Kinani Ngeze had unleashed on Central Africa with his nundu had been held back for a time, and the teachers had thought it safe to send the students home, but then it broke through the quarantine measures in July and decimated the already-weakened magical community. Some of the girls’ friends had died. Some were still at home sick or in quarantine. And even those who had been cured of the virus, like Kimpa, still struggled with the aftermath.

Kimpa suffered lingering joint and muscle pain and fatigue; she walked stiffly, and she had slept for a good part of the journey, leaning against Jacqueline’s chest—not an easy feat on the back of an elephant. Such symptoms would normally be easily treatable for witches and wizards, but nothing was ever so simple when a nundu was involved. Kimpa was, at this point, trying to fully wake up so she wouldn’t be dead on her feet when they got to the school, and Jacqueline offered her a canteen of water, which she drank greedily.

“It’s going to be hard this year,” Jacqueline said bitterly, “so many people being gone. I thought we were out of the woods after the war.” She absently rubbed at the curling, rope-like scars on her arms.

“It’s always hard times in some country that comes to Al-Sahil,” Kimpa said. “Although it was very hard to leave my family this time. I almost didn’t come. Especially since I’ve already had the Red Death. Someone has to tend to the ill.” And bury the dead went unspoken.

“You’re not in much of a condition to do that, yourself,” Rosalie reminded her.

“I know. But I mostly came because Mother and Father kept telling me how important my education
“That is true. That’s what my uncle always says. It’s why I came back last year.” That year, of course, it was because she’d managed to avoid the plague so far, and it was safer for her at school.

“I feel for you two,” Kimpa said. “Suffering disasters at home for two years in a row must be awful.”

“Mm hmm,” Rosalie murmured. It was true; there always seemed to be conflict somewhere the vast region that Al-Sahil served—and least in the muggle world, and wizards were never entirely immune to that. With Rosalie hailing from Burundi and Jacqueline from Rwanda, they had been hit especially hard by both the East African War and the plague. Rosalie had lost both of her parents when Ngeze’s nundu destroyed the Burundian Ministry, leaving her to live with her uncle, but that had been just the start of her and her friends’ trials. At the end of their fifth year, after Jacqueline and Rosalie had said goodbye to Kimpa at Kisangani, they had tried to continue home. The East African War was still raging at the time, and there had been much debate about keeping them at Al-Sahil. Indeed, they both were kept there a while past the end of term with Kimpa staying by their sides out of solidarity, but before long, Edward Grayson’s force had liberated Burundi, and Rosalie’s family wanted to be close to her. Jacqueline was never considered an at-risk target in the first place, so they both set off for home after that.

Unfortunately, things didn’t go as smoothly as they’d hoped, and they got waylaid when they stumbled into the forces fighting Albus Dumbledore’s secret advance in Eastern Zaire. In the space of an hour, their guide was killed, their elephant was lost, they were separated from the rest of their caravan, and they were left alone with no hope of making it all the way to Burundi. (There was a big stink this summer after the teachers made a mistake like that two years in a row.) With no other options, Jacqueline led Rosalie out of the frying pan and into the fire in hopes of finding sanctuary, bribing a couple of local smugglers to take them in a boat across Lake Kivu to make it to her older brother’s apartment in Gisenyi. It was debatable whether that was more or less dangerous than trying to fend for themselves in Zaire until the war ended: Jacqueline was Hutu, but Rosalie was Tutsi.

And Rosalie happened to look just like the not-entirely-accurate stereotype of a Tutsi that the militias were watching for—one of the few still alive in Gisenyi. Still, she had wept with gratitude to have a friend who was willing to put her life on the line for her and went willingly. It was easily the most dangerous thing either of them had ever done. They’d had to sneak into the city in the dead of night, to a place neither of them had ever seen, and where they weren’t even certain Jacqueline’s brother was, or how he would react. When they found him, Jacqueline had to threaten to duel him, which probably would have brought the whole city down on their heads, before he agreed to hide Rosalie there.

They kept Rosalie’s presence a secret for over a month from the muggle and magical militias while the ICW and RPF forces took back the country city by city. It was just their luck that Gisenyi was the last city to be liberated. They had more close calls than they cared to remember in those last few days when Ngeze himself swept into town, and they both still had nightmares about it.

Jacqueline had watched the Battle of Gisenyi from the bedroom window and described it to Rosalie, who was hiding under the bed, shaking with fear. She saw the duel between Dumbledore, Grayson, and Ngeze as a fireworks show in the distance. The apartment building shook terribly from the erumpent-induced explosions when the dark lord had set off his stampede, and they were lucky it stayed standing. And even Jacqueline had turned and dived under the bed with Rosalie when she heard the nundu’s demonic roar.

Their scars had come in the aftermath of the battle. When they tried to dig their way through the rubble to find a witch or wizard who could help them get home, Jacqueline had been attacked by the
stinging nettle vines that Ngeze had used on the ICW forces, and that was only the first of many
dangers they’d faced that day. The wizarding quarter of Gisenyi was a minefield of conjured attacks
and unspent curses. Jacqueline’s brother had nearly been killed by a swarm of driver ants, and
Rosalie was badly burnt by something that resembled bubotuber pus.

Rosalie shook herself out of her reminiscing. She had an elephant to drive. She inexpertly kicked her
heels into the animal’s shoulders—not hard, but enough to make it stop and shake its head in protest.

“Whoa!”

“Hey, easy. She’s not a horse,” Kimpa said.

Rosalie wobbled suddenly and, in a panic, rapped the elephant with her pole several times, harder
than she’d intended. The elephant turned around and shook harder, and the inexperienced Rosalie
struggled to stay on. But Kimpa reached out fast, steadying her and grabbing the end of the pole at
the same time.

“Watch it with that,” she warned. “Whoa, whoa, easy, girl.” Kimpa pulled herself up and leaned
forward across Rosalie’s shoulder. Reaching down, she rubbed the top of the elephant’s head
affectionately: “It’s alright. She’s just new at this. She didn’t mean to hurt you. You’re doing fine.
Keep going.” The elephant calmed down and continued plodding on her way. “Remember, the
magical elephants know what they’re doing,” she reminded her friend. “You don’t need to stick her
with a hook like a common muggle. Berilia here is very intelligent, aren’t you, girl?”

Berilia made an approving whistling sound.

“You see? She understands. A kind word and light touch are enough to guide her.”

“Yes, just a gentle nudge with the pole, and don’t pull on her ears. You told me,” Rosalie said.
“Sorry, Berilia.”

“Often, you won’t even need the pole,” Kimpa said. “She knows where to go.” Indeed, the same
space-bending magic that allowed post owls in Europe to never get lost and to deliver their letters
faster than the birds could normally fly also allowed the caravan of magical elephants to cross Zaire
quicker than ought to have been physically possible. It was even easier on a journey like this because
Berilia could move with her herd. The Zairean students needed a whole herd for the caravan, so
there was no need to break up the family.

“What would we do without you?” Rosalie asked Kimpa.

“You’d probably still be in Mbandaka,” replied with a laugh. “Here, you want me to take over the
rest of the way?”

“No, no, I’ve got it. We’re almost there anyway.”

“It’s really no trouble.”

“Relax, Kimpa,” Jacqueline said. “You just take it easy. You’ve taken care of us for so long. Let us
take care of you now.”

She flashed a weary smile and said, “Thank you. Both of you.” Kimpa had been her friends’ rock
through their hardships over the past two years. When they tried to make their ill-fated journey home
a year ago, she had given them extra money, supplies, and maps at her home, and Jacqueline and
Rosalie agreed that they never could have made it without her help. Now that she was recovering,
though, they were happy to take care of her.
“Almost there,” Rosalie said, gazing out across the scrub. “I can see the tower now.”

“Good. I’m starving,” Jacqueline said.

“There might still be some fruit in the saddlebags.”

“No, I think Berilia ate the last of it.” She sat in silence for a while as Kimpa settled back against her wearily. “All that death, and they couldn’t bring in that dog. Ngeze,” she mused quietly. The others nodded. All three of them hated the man pretty thoroughly by now for what he’d done to them and their families.

“Yes, bane of our lives,” Rosalie agreed. “I heard a rumour he’s headed to Europe.”

“I’ve heard a lot of rumours. The point is, he’s still out there.”

“Well, if that’s where he’s going, the ICW will be even busier. They’re dealing with two Dark Lords in Britain already, and that’s Albus Dumbledore’s homeland.”

“I hope they fare better than we did. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

“Maybe they will. Edward Grayson’s there, too. And I heard a rumour they’re already bringing in more people from the ICW.”

“Sure, they would act faster when the trouble’s in the ICW’s backyard,” Jacqueline groused.

“I don’t know about that,” Rosalie said. “My world history is a little rusty. Did they intervene in Britain’s last civil war?”

“I…don’t remember, either.”

“Let’s not talk about this,” Kimpa cut off the discussion. “Have you thought about what you want to do after graduation?”

Jacqueline tried to shift gears quickly and thought for a minute. “Er…Well…” What did she want to do? Well, she did have one idea. “I guess lately, I’ve been thinking about becoming an Auror.”

Rosalie and Kimpa feel silent. Slowly, both of them turned around and craned their necks to look at her.

“I think I could see that,” Kimpa said softly.

“Really?”

“Yes. You’re a protector. It’s your natural role. I could see it even before the war.”

“Huh. I hadn’t really thought of it that way.”

“Why not?” asked Rosalie. “You were my protector. Weren’t you about to take on a whole city for me?”

Jacqueline smiled awkwardly. “I wouldn’t put it that way, but I guess so. What about you, Kimpa? Any plans?”

“I’ve been thinking about becoming a Healer for a while,” she answered.

“Oh, you’d definitely be good at that,” Rosalie agreed.
“I hope so. Only I haven’t decided human or animal yet.”

Her friends laughed. “Can’t pick just one, can you?” Rosalie said wistfully.

They waited a moment for her to share her plans as well. When she didn’t, Jacqueline posed the question directly.

“I don’t know,” Rosalie said. “You both have big dreams, and I haven’t really thought about it. I always just thought I’d do something nice and quiet and…safe. Maybe even just being a homemaker and starting a family.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Kimpa told her. “The world needs mothers just as much as it needs Aurors and Healers. Being true to yourself is more important than trying to follow someone else’s dream.”

“Thanks,” Rosalie whispered.

“Besides, we still have plenty of time to decide,” Jaqueline said. “Although…” She gave her an appraising look, “I think you’d make a good teacher.”

“You do?” she said in surprise.

“You’re certainly good enough at Charms. You’re the one who did most of the magic to sneak us into Gisenyi, remember? Disillusionment, magical disguises, repelling charms—you could do it.”

“Huh…I’ve never thought about that before, but…maybe I will.”

“Alright, then it’s settled,” Jacqueline said with a laugh. “I’ll fight; Kimpa, you patch me up; and Rosalie, you teach the children.”

They all laughed at that. Things were never so certain, but after all they had been through, they could finally begin to dream big.
Sally-Anne Perks landed with a rush of wind and a thud on the grass with a dozen of her fellow students. Most of them still hadn’t mastered Portkey travel, and they dragged the whole group down to fall in a heap. Most schools had moved on to more comfortable methods of transport, but since Athabasca took all of the English- and French-speaking students outside the United States from Yukon to French Guiana, they still used Portkeys.

“Five thirty-five from Toronto. Welcome back,” said Professor Kakeesheway as she helped the younger students untangle themselves. Sally-Anne stood up, brushed herself off, and looked around with a smile.

*I’m home,* she thought.

Sally-Anne didn’t have a difficult home life by any stretch. She loved her parents, and her parents loved her. Her father was a professional, and they never wanted for anything important. But she thought of herself as a witch first, even as a muggle-born. The magical world was home to her by now, and especially the school where she spent nine months of the year year.

“Sally-Anne!” her friend, Solange, call from another Portkey point. “Hey, Sally-Anne! Come on!” she motioned for her to catch up. Sally-Anne snapped out of gazing at the castle and hurried to rejoin her friends amid a larger group walking up to the school. She’d been excited to meet people from so many different places when she first came to Athabasca, and she made an effort to befriend many of them. Solange was one of her best friends, despite the fact that they came from practically two different worlds; Sally-Anne came from money while Solange had grown up in what she dispassionately called the slums of Port-au-Prince, but they were alike in so many ways. They were both muggle-borns, for one, and they shared that inquisitiveness that was so common to modern muggle-borns, and they had hit it off at once.

“Hi everybody,” Sally-Anne told her circle of friends as they made their way up the hill. “Have a good summer, eh?”

Most of them had, they said, despite the unsettling goings-on around the world. Things were peaceful in Canada, at least. They were well out of the way.

“You heard about Harry Potter?” Solange asked the question everyone was thinking.

Of course, she’d heard about Harry Potter, Sally-Anne thought. *Everyone* had heard about Harry Potter. But she had actually *met* Harry Potter.

Sally-Anne had certainly had an unusual life over the past four years. At first, she’d been overwhelmed when she was told that magic existed, that she was a witch, and that she was invited to
study at a secret magical school in Scotland. A shy, quiet girl in an unfamiliar environment, it had taken her a while to settle in. She was lucky to have a friendly roommate who also had grown up in the muggle world in Hermione Granger. Hermione had known about magic for years and was happy to show her the ropes, but as she was constantly busy studying and trying to keep her more famous brother alive, they hadn’t grown very close.

In a place like Hogwarts, where aristocrats and celebrities like Harry Potter garnered most of the attention, Sally-Anne always felt like she was fading into the background there—the least noticed of her roommates, the least involved in any of the exciting happenings at Hogwarts, the least extraordinary—she was average in her classes, she didn’t have extraordinary magical skill, and she was pants on a broom—and as a muggle-born with no connections, much of the school looked down on her. She suspected most people didn’t even notice when she left.

But even so, she enjoyed Hogwarts. She had her small circle of friends (mostly girls from Hufflepuff, as it happened). She had fun learning magic, and it was nearly as fun living in a huge castle with ghosts and talking portraits and moving staircases. Even if the occasional mountain troll or dark wizard broke in, she wouldn’t have traded it for anything.

Then, in second year, things got personal. It wasn’t just a dark wizard acting on some old feud against one student. Several muggle-born students were attacked over the course of the year, and, just like that, it wasn’t so fun anymore. Dad had a standing job offer in Toronto, so her parents had had no reservations about pulling her out over Christmas Holidays and moving the family overseas. It wasn’t just her, after all. They had her little brother, Johnny, to worry about, too. He would be going next year.

And so, come January, Sally-Anne had found herself attending Athabasca Academy of Arcana, and, to her own surprise, she’d never looked back. She found at Athabasca what she didn’t even know she was looking for at Hogwarts: a home in the magical world. Ironically, it wasn’t until she left Hogwarts that she finally realised why she’d been Sorted into Gryffindor. Where she had faded into the background there, at Athabasca, she was an instant (if minor) celebrity, simply because she knew Harry Potter! She happily told them all she knew about him, which wasn’t much, but at least she had firsthand experience. It was the first time she had really been at the centre of attention. Almost no one cared that she was muggle-born here (the Americas were generally considered more tolerant than Europe), and even if it wasn’t for the best of reasons, it finally broke her out of her shell, and by the time the novelty had worn off, she had gained some lifelong friends.

She learnt that she was a crack shot with a wand if she put her mind to it, and with enough motivation behind her, she’d raised her marks to the top quintile in her year. She found that even though she was pants on a broom, she enjoyed watching Quidditch, and she had a gift for commenting—so much so that Professor Delahaye had made her the starting commentator for this year’s matches.

Meanwhile, the news out of Britain kept coming, and it only seemed to get weirder as the years went on. The creature that was terrifying Hogwarts was revealed to be a basilisk and was killed by Harry Potter and his friend, Neville Longbottom. Sally-Anne had always liked Neville. He was very kind and was friendlier with her than the other Gryffindors in her year. She was certainly glad everyone was alright across the pond, but by then, she was so in love with Athabasca that she had no desire to go back.

In her third year, she was very surprised to receive a letter from Harry Potter himself. That was almost a bigger furor than when she’d first arrived. The subject of the letter was equally surprising. Apparently, a little girl in Hogsmeade had been bitten by a werewolf, and Harry was determined to find a school that would take her next year. She’d heard rumours of Harry’s reported compassion
and commitment to justice, but this was the first direct show of it she had seen. She was touched by his letter, and dutifully asked the Headmaster, but she’d had to report back to him that he’d have better luck with the United States schools. In the end, it turned out to be unnecessary. Werewolf relations in England were changed for the better after the miraculous capture of the most feared werewolf in Europe…with a little help from Harry Potter, naturally.

Last year, it got even weirder. The international headlines crowed that Harry had been selected as a champion in an extremely dangerous interscholastic tournament…for a school that wasn’t even participating! Sally-Anne and her friends had followed the Tetrwizard Tournament closely, and they were repeatedly amazed by how well Harry did against his far more advanced competition—even if he was the Boy-Who-Lived. Then, last June, a flurry of headlines catapulted him from interesting overseas news to an international sensation.

Harry Potter had won the Tournament.

Harry Potter was an animagus!

Harry Potter said Voldemort was back from the dead!

**Harry Potter said La Pantera was working with Voldemort!**

That last one was the most worrying to the North Americans. Sally-Anne had learnt to fear Voldemort’s name during her short time in wizarding Britain, but La Pantera was infamous all over the Western Hemisphere. Athabasca’s three students from Belize told horror stories about her. And with that news, everyone was thinking the same thing. There was a very good chance that the ICW would get involved, and God only knew where that would end.

The air was thick with rumours at Athabasca this year. It wasn’t fear, as was surely gripping Britain right now, but there was a growing apprehension such as must have been felt back in muggle Britain in 1938 or 1939—a sense that war was coming, and the only question was when they would be drawn into it.

“Officially, Lord V. is an internal British matter, according to the ICW,” one of the older students, Prefect Lee said. Sally-Anne always thought Lee reminded her of Percy Weasley—ambitious, politically-minded, and a little pompous—but definitely well-informed. It wasn’t uncommon for Voldemort to be known as Lord V. in Commonwealth countries as a sort of compromise between the conventions of Britain and the rest of the world. “However, they’re claiming La Pantera broke some treaty or other. I’m not sure it even matters which one. As far as the ICW’s concerned, she gave aide to a foreign dark lord, and that puts her within their jurisdiction. That’s why they’re sending a special law enforcement mission to apprehend her.”

“She won’t go quietly,” one of the other prefects said. Sally-Anne couldn’t quite remember his name. “She might do a runner back to Mexico, but she won’t let herself get caught.”

“The ICW won’t slack off either, though,” Solange said. “I heard a rumour back home that Old Coyote is joining the task force.”

“Old Coyote?” Lee said sceptically, “You think MACUSA will let him take that much time away from making wands?”

“That’s just what I heard. Old Coyote fought Grindelwald himself way back when, didn’t he?”

“Yes, but you know how MACUSA is, though. I would’ve thought they’d declare him a national asset or something.”"
“I don’t know. Sally-Anne, have you heard anything from Britain?”

Sally-Anne frowned. “Not a lot,” she said. “I wrote a couple of my old friends. They’re scared. I know that. Susan Bones—her’s aunt’s the Director of Magical Law Enforcement—she says the Ministry’s mobilising for war over there, but they’re having a lot of arguments about what to do about dark creatures like dementors, werewolves, and giants.”

“Giants aren’t dark!” another boy yelled. “They don’t even use magic.”

“In Britain, people think they are. They teamed up with Voldemort in the last war—of course, all the giants in Europe have been exiled to Russia, so I don’t know how much difference they’ll make.”

“Did you hear anything about the ICW?” Lee asked.

“All I know for sure is that Edward Grayson is part of the mission. He’s really good, though. I read a lot about the East African War over the summer. He and Dumbledore were doing things I’d never heard of before. Oh, and there’s a rumour about Dumbledore running some secret intelligence-gathering auxiliary, but that might be completely made up.”

“Forget about that,” her friend, Stephen, said, “did you find anything out about Harry Potter?”

Sally-Anne rolled her eyes. This was getting a bit old after two and a half years. “Not much more than I’ve already told you,” she said. “I tried writing him, but I only got a polite reply from his sister saying they were very busy, and a lot of what they were doing was secret.”

“But that means they’re in on it, doesn’t it?” Stephen insisted.

“It means they have to be especially careful because Voldemort is still trying to kill them. She did tell me that Harry really is an animagus and has been since he was a little kid because of what they think was a really weird bout of accidental magic. She wouldn’t say much else, but I heard rumours from the other girls I wrote that Harry’s friends with several werewolves, and he’s trying to help negotiate with the packs.”

“Do you think it’s true?” Solange asked with wide eyes. That wasn’t one she’d heard before.

“I don’t know for sure, but I’d believe it. Harry always had a really noble streak, and he’s been involved in politics since his first year. I told you how he was trying to help werewolves the year before last, remember. And all the stories agree he was there when that other champion—Diggory—was killed, and he was a werewolf, too.”

“Will that make them not want to follow Lord V.?” said Solange.

“From what little I know, I’m guessing it won’t matter much,” Sally-Anne replied. “The ones who don’t like the Ministry will probably stay that way.”

“How much influence does Harry Potter have at the Ministry, Perks?” Lee asked with interest. “He’s on their Wizengamot, isn’t he?”

“Something like that. Maybe. It might be through a proxy or something. Sorry, I should know this. I read his book, and he talks all about how he helped the Muggle Protection Act get passed. Susan says it’s all about coalitions and quid pro quid and stuff like that on the Wizengamot anyway, but it does sound like he swung a few votes. I know whenever he talked at school, people listened to him. Except that one time when it came out that he’s a Parselmouth. Half the school thought he was a dark wizard, then. Of course, all that only matters if the Ministry can stand up to Voldemort. Everyone in Britain talks like he had them on the ropes last time.”
“On the ropes?” Stephen asked.

She rolled her eyes. Why couldn’t they get muggle idioms? “Almost beat them? Had them on the edge of the duelling wards?”

“Oh, right. But didn’t Harry Potter beat Lord V. last time?”

“Didn’t you read the book? Harry insists it wasn’t him. His mother put some kind of magical protection on him. He can’t just do the same thing again.”

Everyone around her sank into a subdued silence. Of course, it wouldn’t be that easy.

“Well,” Lee broke it, “the real trouble is if La Pantera tries to fight to stay in Britain. If she keeps standing with Lord V., the ICW will have to take on Voldemort directly. That would be bad—”

“Excuse me, bad for whom,” Sally-Anne cut in. “I’ve got friends in Britain. If they can stop Voldemort sooner, it’s good for them.”

“It’s not good for anybody else, though,” Lee insisted. “You said you read up on the East African War. You know what it did to Zaire and Tanzania and the other countries over there. If Lord V. cuts La Pantera loose, he can try to keep the fighting in Britain. Otherwise, it will spill over to other countries. God, can you imagine? A new international wizarding war, in the West? It would be awful. And even if it’s many on one—which it might not be given Scandinavia’s leanings—there’s no guarantee it’ll be faster that way.”

“Well, it can’t be that bad, can it? I mean, Voldemort doesn’t even control the British Ministry.” But he might soon, she was forced to remind herself.

“He’s kind of right,” Solange told her. “Didn’t Ngeze take down, like, three different Ministries in East Africa or something? Even if it goes faster, it could be a lot worse.”

That gave Sally-Anne pause. It was true: Kinani Ngeze did take down three Ministries of Magic in East Africa with his nundu, and the ICW never even figured out how he did it until he chose to reveal it. Suppose Voldemort or La Pantera had a similar trick up their sleeves. Either way, Britain was in a big pickle already, and if the ICW took action, could Canada be affected? Could the Caribbean countries?

“Oh, why are we all standing around, moping?” Solange demanded when the silence stretched too long for her. “Bad things are gonna happen, but the first night back is not the time to dwell on them. “For everything there is a season,” and all that.”

“Amen!” Sally-Anne agreed, clapping her friend on the shoulder.

“Amen! Let’s go eat.”

They laughed and hurried into the castle. But just before she stepped inside, Sally-Anne paused and turned around to take one last look at the grounds. She’d been in love with Athabasca from the moment she’d first laid eyes on it. It had all the best parts of Hogwarts—a castle in a medieval revival style with a lot of First Nations artwork thrown in, magical creatures of all sorts, a view from the higher towers where you could see for miles over the wilderness, and more—but the scenery was even better than Scotland in other ways. The castle was built on a mountainside rather than a ravine. Instead of a gorge below, a river ran practically through the castle, cascading down waterfall after waterfall in between the towers and walkways. The whole school was built up around the landmark. At night, the charms on the dorms muffled the thunder of the waterfalls just the right amount for it to sooth her to sleep.
Unlike Hogwarts, where the only sport was Quidditch, here they had a Quodpot Club, plus whitewater kayaking, of all things, and a few other small sports and clubs. And that wasn’t even counting the quality of the education itself. The classes were definitely more pertinent to the modern witch or wizard. Astronomy was an elective here (which Sally-Anne enjoyed immensely, thank you very much). What Hogwarts called Charms was two classes at Athabasca: one still called Charms, which covered all aspects of wand-work, and the other called Enchantments, which covered magical artifact-making and more diverse forms of magic. Shortcuts to European spells that First Nations wizards had used for millennia were taught in that class, and even low-level rituals weren’t shied away from. And best of all, none of the teachers were as bad as Snape or Binns. Her friends had been horrified when she described those two to them.

And then, there were the local fauna, which were just cooler than the ones in Scotland. A colony of Sasquatch—creatures smarter than trolls and probably on par with giants, at a guess—lived in the forest on the grounds. Though skittish around muggles, Sasquatch were more sociable than the Hogwarts centaurs and merpeople, and it wasn’t uncommon for them to befriend students, and they also helped the groundskeeper rustle a small herd of real live re’em—quite possibly the world’s largest land animal. True, the thunderbirds caused an unholy racket whenever a storm rolled through. And the Magical Creatures teacher, though not on Snape’s level, was a mermaid from Trinidad who could be right scary with that trident of hers, but hey, no place was perfect. After two and a half years, Sally-Anne had learnt to roll with the bad along with the good. In her opinion, just living in a place this beautiful was worth it.

“Sally-Anne, come on! You can reminisce all you want tomorrow!” Solange called.

“Coming, Solange!” she replied. I love this place. She followed her friend inside. Whatever the future would bring, for now, at least, all was right with her world.

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