Boy and the Begining

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Boy and the Begining

by aliengirlguy

Summary

An epic, fantastical, global journey of a magical boy as he brings change to himself and the world around him in small and large ways.

Notes

This is an AU, majorly, that will touch base on some cannon, but otherwise will go its own way. Its primarily a journey fic with Harry traveling around and experiencing things. it can come across as drabblish from time to time.

This is from my original over on ffnet.

Disclaimer: Harry Potter belongs to its creator, mentions of the other fairy tales and stories that the character reads in the fic are the properties of those who created them.
Harry James Potter was of the opinion that he was not Normal.

Of course, when referencing "Normal" when it came to the opinion of his family, the Dursley's ("family" being of the little "f" in the loosest sense of the term) it is with a big capital 'N,' as his family often emphasized just how "Normal" they were. So when they felt something within their presence that was less then capital "N," that thing that lacked the all important distinction of "N" was definitely the more abominable, agonizing, and Agh! what will the neighbors think?! "Abnormal" with a capital 'A.'

As far as his little "f," capital "N" Normal family was concerned, Harry was decidedly a great big capital "A" Abnormal.

Harry, who had been metaphorically branded with his scarlet "A" since he could toddle, had accepted the reality of being Abnormal, and had noticed differences to the natural state of living as either a Normal and Abnormal.

For example, Harry Potter was, by nature, a rather quiet child, who was often as scarce as a shadow at high noon when he could be. He took being a non-entity as a matter of course, and was often proud when an adult that did, on the rare occasion notice him, seemed baffled by the sudden appearance of a small bespectacled boy with knobby knees and horrendous glasses in their midst, usually during roll call in new classes or with substitute teachers.

Harry Potter lived in a cupboard under the stairs, unlike Normal kids, and strange freakish things didn't happen around them, such as teacher's hair turning blue, or hair in general growing back overnight, even if Harry didn't understand how it happened, or why he was specifically at fault.
Abnormals had to be as seen and heard as little as possible, or else others would notice that there was something different about you from regular, Normal folk, which Harry knew was a VERY BAD THING as far as the Dursley's are concerned.

The Dursley's meanwhile, a decidedly Normal, perfect family, were loud, opinionated, and of two of the three, took up much of the available space within a room whenever possible. They endorsed their Normalcy through respectable careers (such as selling Drills), pass-times (such as spying on the neighbors), and how perfectly perfect their Duddikins was in every way, despite what school nurses said about obesity and report cards said about below average grades.

Having a status such as Harry's also meant that he had to earn the Dursley's gracious keep, and often did many chores when not seeing to school related matters. He was not always successful in his endeavors to appease his relatives and often he was either locked him in his cupboard and/or not given anything to eat.

As a result of his status, Harry had to develop a decent hand at scavenging and nicking things from other peoples window sills, garages and yards. Though he wasn't a greedy boy and usually only took the odd useful knick-knack, like a skipping rope from a fellow classmate's backpack as a belt for the latest season's hand-me-downs, the oldest grimmest winter gear from a neighbor's open garage, a cooling pie on Mrs. Number 7's window, or a piece of meat from an untended BBQ or a garden of tomatoes.

He'd been occasionally caught in the act by neighbors, and thus, Harry compounded his Abnormality even more. After all, thievery is not an activity that Normal people engaged in.

Then there happened upon such a day, like many other, where Harry had been sent outside to wander around the neighborhood while his aunt held her weekly get-togethers with those in the neighborhood (usually the wives) who came as close to the big "N" standard as possible in Petunia Dursley's vision.

It was he was meandering past Number 12 that his eyes happened to trace over a box at the end of the driveway, a box filled to overflowing with a wide variety of books. His inherent practicality, remembering that his Uncle's sister Marge, whom hated Harry in particular, would be visiting in a few weeks and thus he would be staying in his cupboard for the majority of the visit. He knew he would likely need something to occupy himself, and thus seeing a source of material that would occupy him during the long stretch and alleviate his boredom (which he considered to be a rather cruel fate for anyone really) he helped himself to the crooked box of books.

After his Aunt's friends had left, and the woman had retired upstairs to watch her stories, Harry used the short window to sneak himself and his prize back into his cupboard under the stairs where he safely squirrelled them away in a dark corner behind an old vacuum cleaner.

As he set about peeling potatoes for dinner, he congratulated himself on his good fortune.

ooo ooo ooo

Despite what it might look like, Harry's big pile of books did not automatically mean that he was some sort of bookworm super-genius. Harry had a decent mind, he'd picked up reading and some basic math at a fairly early age, but that was only out of necessity when he had been assigned the cooking once deemed old enough to be coordinated to handle a stool and the cooking implements. He was not remarkable in school (which was proper, given his status).

Books were the only methods by which he was allowed to understand the world at large. He was not allowed to watch TV or movies, nor listen to the radio, or go on the computer, and since he didn’t
Harry did know a fundamental truth recognized in the world, for all his enforced isolation, and that was that knowledge is power.

Harry wanted a future away from the Dursley's someday, and he had long heard the speeches made in class and in gyms, or overheard on the telly through his cupboard door, that you need an education, knowledge, to make something of yourself in the world. Without a good education he would not be able to escape them, and since knowledge can be found in books, the more he could gather to himself secretly, without adults potentially taking them away from him, the box he had found was a potential gold mine of knowledge that would help him in the future.

Still, he decided to wait to explore his haul until Aunt Marge arrived, as he also needed to stave off that most dreaded of enemies, boredom, during the long haul in his cupboard.

One of the things that separated the everyday normal people with a small 'n' from the more exemplary big 'N's like the Dursleys was that they absolutely abhorred anything fantastical in nature being even mentioned in passing in their presence.

There was no fantasy stories, no make believe, things that were a common theme in many "n" children's lives such as fairy tales, myths, and legends, even the Tooth Fairy and Santa Clause, were never mentioned in the Dursley household.

Fantasy is Abnormal, and words like "magic" are considered the foulest of terms as far as "N" people like the Dursleys were concerned.

The Dursleys also made sure that the teachers of the boys never talked about unnatural things that were usually found when teaching things, emphasizing the protection of impressionable youth, that stories like dragons that breath fire will give children ideas and soon the entire neighborhood would run wild with hooligans setting fires, kidnapping women, and stabbing people through the chest with various sharp instruments. The campaign was backed by a fair few of the big "N" crowd of Vernon Dursley's acquiescence, including a few that were big donators to the school district. This, and because the school board was of the most unimaginative sort anyway, it was accommodated easily.

Because of this, he had never come across fantasy stories before.

So when Harry picked up the book at the very top, a slightly large, dog eared book filled with fairy tales, he was amazed, and a little nervous, once he got over his bafflement, at the sheer rich unnaturalness he was faced with in the words of the Normally forbidden book. His wide hungry eyes traveled over words that painted distant fictional countries, folktales of fantastical creatures, and stories of mighty heroes, gods, and all sorts of forbidden subjects that the boy had not realized existed until that moment, and oh! so deliciously taboo.

Harry enjoyed the stories as he passed the time, feeling a distinct sense of excitement at his naughtiness, curiosity over the foreign concept, and an odd reliability and kin-ship with the fictional characters and creatures within the pages, but he had to ask himself, at the end of a chapter or story, if these works of forbidden fantastical fiction -having never seen dragons, or dwarves that mined diamonds, or mad hatters drinking tea with mice and hares -what knowledge he possibly obtained that could help him in the real world? (1)(2).

In the school year after Harry turned 8, Harry's confused but avid forbidden relationship with those
books were put into a whole new perspective.

He had been running from his large cousin and his friend, having the misfortune to accidentally be noticed by his cousin on the playground. Dudley and his cronies were bored, and decided that a spot of Harry Hunting would liven things up tremendously.

Harry, being smart, of course ran. He was usually nimble and rather quick, but that day he made the bad mistake of running into a dead end between two buildings on the school grounds. As he ran towards a dumpster, panicked at his situation, knowing he was in for a world of pain when he was caught by his cousin. Then he thought, suddenly, of his favorite story, Peter Pan, and wished dearly in that moment, that he could just fly away into the sky and hide in the clouds where no one would reach him.

That's when a sudden rushing sensation filled him, a feeling of intense, though not uncomfortable warmth and weightlessness filled him, and then the world around him tilted.

Harry wasn't there to see his confused cousin and friends as they rounded the corner, finding nothing but a lone dumpster and grimy walls.

Ooo ooo ooo

When Harry regained his equilibrium, he was treated to the terrifying sight that only the school pigeons were graced with.

Wisteria Primary School spread beneath him like a tiny toy set.

Only years of having the urge to scream forcefully repressed in him kept from that very thing happening and thus attracting attention of himself, though given his location and current level, there wasn't anyone that would have heard him.

His cloths were trenched from the nearby clouds all around him, and he shivered in the wind and high altitude.

It took him quite a while to calm down.

When he was calm enough for some coherent thought, he considered his situation.

He was hovering, quite high above his school. No machine of any kind was supporting him, just open air all around him, as if gravity had sort of half-forgotten him.

He applied his hard earned rationale to the situation.

He had been running, high on emotion and worry. Then suddenly, he was up in the air.

Then he remembered the wish he had before that strange, weird rushing warmth happened.

He had wanted to be up in the sky, like Peter Pan.

It suddenly clicked. An epiphany that would completely change everything for one boy.

His books! The fairy tales! The legends, the myths, etc. they had talked about people that could fly!

Peter Pan, though fictional, was at the character's most basic level just a boy who could fly. Harry, in this moment, at his most basic level, was a boy who was currently flying, well hovering at the moment, but still up in the air.
That was it!

His stories actually did have an application in the real world! They applied to him! They must be part of the capital “A” that Harry sat under. That was it! it all seemed so clear to him now!

The fantasy stories he had read were filled with things that were not part of the Normal world. Therefore, that must mean they Were opposite, the Abnormal world. After all, Peter Pan was a flying boy, and Harry, who was Abnormal, could fly like Peter-Pan. Therefore, Peter-Pan was an Abnormal story, as were other stories like it.

He had another thought: could Harry do other things that were mentioned in the stories?

For the first time ever, Harry felt a strong wave of excited expectation, glee, and purpose.

Harry used his time floating among the clouds to figure out what he was going to do. He was a child who knew the values of setting goals and having plans. While he didn't have a really detailed one yet, just a sure notion of something to do, he decided that his first goal was figuring out how to get down.

It took him an hour, fits and starts, and near plummets, to figure out that this flying, while definitely harder than Peter made it seem, was all about wanting to be in a particular place or direction, at the same time, wanting it to happen at a particular speed. That last part he had learned the hard way after nearly crashing into the school roof.

By the time he had touched ground, he was exhausted and the sun was almost down.

He groaned and hoped no one had called the Dursleys about him missing.

He was lucky.

They had a substitute that day, and Harry's unobtrusive nature had made it so the woman didn't remember he was even a part of the class. Further luck was with him, in that the Dursleys didn't care that he was missing, so long as he was home to do chores, and that evening, he had been excused from cooking, as the Dursleys were invited to a dinner party for his uncles business, leaving Harry locked in his cupboard for the evening as soon as he walked into the door.

He used this boon of quiet to fine tune his thoughts.

He was very tired. He figured that whatever it was, magic he supposed, a word mentioned so much in the books, obviously needed some work. He reasoned it was like an unused muscle, something he had read about in a health book once, that needed practice to become stronger.

Since flying was the first thing he had done, and practical for the forming plan in his young mind, he decided that he would work on this flying until he would no longer be as tired as he was, and could do it with the same ease as Peter, or as close to it anyway.

Nodding to himself, he settled into a deep sleep.

A/N: (1): Snow White, (2) Alice in Wonderland.
Review and tell me what you think.
Harry had once heard a phrase spoken by the Normals. Taking baby steps.

Harry took good advice to heart, no matter the origin. Harry knew that he had been lucky, possibly due to the adrenaline high and his wild emotions at the time, which had kept him from becoming a Harry pancake on the school grounds the day he realized that magic was real.

Harry had discovered that the flying was proving very hard indeed.

His stories gave no instructions. They were fiction after all, so the boy had used his experiences with the first time, but applied them in a safer setting. In this case, his practice area was a small patch of overgrown field that was sandwiched between Wisteria Walk and Privet Dr. More a vacant lot really, but it had an old rusted picnic table and so much overgrowth, that no one could see inside. This was the perfect cover for a boy attempting something decidedly unnatural in such a highly congested Normal environment.

It had been a week since his flying experience and epiphany. He had already started separating himself from the rest of his surroundings; not hard to do really, given how he was treated. He had begun to mentally refer to the rest of humanity and its environments as Normals and the Normal world. The boy thought this was a rather practical category, and made it easier to deal with his family to think that he was not a freak, merely in a separate category as them.

In the meanwhile, back to his flying.

He had started off with merely trying to lift off the ground. He had found, with a calmer emotional state, it was harder to call up the Rush, the feeling his magic gave him just before he flew. He figured that he should have his own word to use, as he felt that using the word 'magic' was not conductive to keeping his abilities secret, should he ever make reference to it outside his own head. If there was one thing he had learned from the stories so far, and his relatives, especially when looking back on he odd incident or to in his past; it was that the Normals did not tolerate abnormality all that well. Calling it something like magic, especially should it accidentally slip his lips somehow, no matter how unlikely, would be inviting trouble. He had seen that documentary on the telly about the Salem
Witch Trials. It had been the only program that the Dursleys had not minded him watching, despite him not understanding what a witch was really at the time, other than a Halloween decoration (something the Dursleys didn't celebrate). No, he rather fancied his safer word, and frankly better description of what he felt when he used his abilities, his Rush.

The Rush, despite his terminology, was rather reluctant and sluggish at first, coming in fits and starts when it did, leaving him terribly tired afterwards. Harry had learned to limit his practice times so he was not too tired for returning to number four and his chores for the evening.

After two weeks of solid practice, he had managed to hover about a few feet off the ground and move in several directions horizontally without tiring.

He graduated after that to the picnic table.

This lead to more bruises then he would have liked, but he persevered. The jumping, he found, seemed to help with taking off, and he mastered this much more quickly.

By the time he had made it to leaping from trees and then onto his neighbors roofs and then from roof to roof, it was nearing the end of winter and heading into the first blush of spring.

During this time, he had mastered maneuvering in mid-air, and was no longer growing tired at all, sometimes occasionally even hovering in the air in his tiny cupboard as he awoke from sleep or was engrossed in a book or thought.

It was during one of his thought sessions, reclining on air in his little practice lot in mid-April, that he began to wonder if he could make other things then himself fly. He had read stories of a few mythical heroes and creatures being able to do this.

He bit his lip thoughtfully. He was a little nervous, what if it didn't work?

Still, he decided to try. He looked down at the book on his chest. It was a book about the 12 labors of Hercules.

He concentrated, much like he did for the first times he flew (now more instinctive with all the time he put in) and thought of his Rush, this time reaching out to the book on his chest.

Nothing happened at first.

He frowned. Then he nearly smacked himself, of course!

He thought of the book hovering up a foot or so.

This time, there was a wobble, a brief flutter of paper.

He focused harder, wanting it to happen with as much of his being as he could.

The book wobbled again, until it rose finally, hesitantly, off his chest before flopping back down when Harry lost his concentration in his surprise and joy. He had done it!

He found that the smaller the object was to his own person, the easier it was to master at moving. He had found that Lifting, as he called it, was another exercise that took time to master. He had a problem though when it came to anything bigger and heavier then him. It was a frustrating barrier, though he wasn't to concerned over it, after all, lifting small items was more useful, as his scavenging and knicking were usually small items.
One day, as he wandered into town, he noticed that the local movie theater was showing a re-
showing of the Star Wars trilogy.

Harry of course, had never even heard of the movies, but he was intrigued non-the less, especially
when he noticed the tall furry creature with the weapons belt that reminded him of the story of the
Sasquatch he had read in his Local legends of Canada book from the box (1).

Harry lifted a bit of money from a few passersby, and paid for a ticket to see all three, thankful that
his relatives were away for the entire day, giving him ample opportunity to watch the films.

Harry discovered the genre called Science Fiction that day. Though it was not really the same as his
fantasy stories, as alien worlds were not really a concern of his, he had found that Luke Skywalker's
lessons in the Force, from the second movie, were something similar to what he faced trying to use
his rush lifting things.

A scene in particular caught his attention. It was with the tiny creature known as Yoda. He was
lecturing a rather put out Luke about how using the force was more about the mind than anything
related to the crude mater of the physical, proving this point by lifting the man's fighter from the
swamp (2).

After the rather entertaining adventure at the theater, he considered the scene he had watched.

He had to admit that he was rather encumbered by the notions that the bigger something was, the
harder it was going to be to lift. It was an entirely sane thought, a Normal notion.

And therein lay Harry's problem. He figured that he would have to face and let go a lot of
misconceptions that he had learned through being part of the Normal's world. Such as the notion of
heaviness; after all, didn't Hercules lift monsters over his head? Hell, he and Atlas both had held the
very sky! And that was a big expanse (despite it not being solid, Harry figured that the ancient
Greeks didn't know about atmospheres and such back then) (3). If Hercules and Atlas could defy the
notions of the physical through sheer muscle, couldn't he do it with his Rush?

With this new mentality, he determinedly went into the garage early the next morning, and practiced
trying to lift the heavy lawn mower he was expected to drag outside to begin the grass cutting.

It took him practice, letting go of the ingrained notions of weight was a tricky thing indeed, but after
another few weeks, he had graduated to lifting his uncle's car up and down in the garage.

Harry was pleased with his progress, and if his relatives didn't notice the fact that he disappeared a
little too quickly, or that there was certain verve in his chores, they never bothered enough to
remember.

Ooo ooo ooo

Spring was already in full swing, with the barest hints of summer filling Privet Dr. with scent of car
soap, hyacinth, and BBQ's.

Harry felt a certain expectancy, a sense of something in the wind, which seemed to whisper to him
that it was finally time.

By this time, Harry had already read the books enough times from the box to the point where leaving
them on the door step of a church was not so difficult a duty. His preparations were already done and
all that was left was to pick a direction.

Ooo ooo ooo
It was a pleasant evening in late May when a green eyed boy, nearly invisible to the quiet, normal neighborhood, disappeared from a long forgotten over grown lot with a rusted picnicking table, and soon just as forgotten as the table by the people. After all, they were an ordinary, normal little neighborhood were nothing extraordinary such as boys disappearing up into thin air ever happens.

They only ones to notice were the boy’s family, and they only celebrated their luck briefly before pushing the wretched memories of the boy to the back of their minds.

Meanwhile, in an old Headmaster's office of an infamous and ancient school, a bird on a golden perch watched, with the stars peeking through the arched tower window, and the distant snores of said Headmaster from his quarters next door; as a selection of whirling, glowing trinkets or mysterious purpose sputtered, then went dead forever.

Ooo ooo ooo

A/n: I know the chaps are short and time has progressed somewhat fast, but I wanted to get into the journey part of this fic.

(1) Sasquatch is the name given to a cryptid ape, or hominid-like creature that some people believe inhabits forests, mainly in the Pacific Northwest region of North America. Bigfoot is usually described as a large, hairy, bipedal humanoid. - Wikipedia. (2) Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back. (3) Hercules and Atlas are from Ancient Greek Mythology, Hercules is the son of the god Zeus and a mortal woman, while Atlas was a Titan punished to hold up the sky.
The Boy and the Right Size

Chapter Summary

Harry starts traveling through Britain.

Chapter Notes

A/N: a few locations are real, one or two are not.

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Story Lexicon so far:

Normals: non-magical people and things notioned/made by them.

Rush/Rushing: using magic.

Lifting: levitating/telekinesis of objects

Abnormals: beings or things that is magical.

Harry had found a recurring theme within many of the fairy tales he had read in his box stories. This theme was of the Heroic Journey.

Basically, a young so and so sets out to make something of themselves, or to rescue or obtain such and such. Harry was not really interested in getting some princess or becoming rich or ruling over a group of people. He rather liked the idea of journeying though, and taking on the present challenges as they arose.

The independent, aimless wanderer characters much appealed to him.

He knew being a small boy in scruffy cloths no better than rags would not do him well in his wanderings through the Normal's world. The last thing he needed was to be carted off by local authorities, or attracting attentions that were of the negative sort should he use his Rush.

As such, he spent his daylight hours resting under bushes or on top of the occasional barn or farm house that dotted the land as he flew further and further east away from cities and avoiding bustling towns.

At night time, the sky became rich with the smell of something other than Normal's pollution. Hints of ozone, a storms arrival for the next day (which he sheltered wherever he could) and the scents of growing things was stronger and wilder, and seemed, well, more natural than anything.

Harry rather approved of this, liking the sting of air that made his young lungs expand. He felt more alive than he ever had before, despite the trials that faced him along his travels.
Air not staled by the smell of his own sweat, dusty and tasting of himself and cleaning products and dead decaying spiders like he would face days at a time in his stuffy little cupboard.

Air without the tangling heat of overripe summer, dying grass and lawn mower exhaust of Privet Dr. when he was let out.

Air that was just perfectly, stunningly free!

Ooo ooo ooo

It was one week into his journey, and Harry had ventured onto his first challenge.

This, of course, centered on the basic necessities of life.

Harry would often make pit stops outside the occasional village or campsite, remaining carefully out of sight, often lifting food from the inattentive Normal. Harry also hung out on the tops of roofs above grocery stores and lifting the occasional bag of bread or canned good. Sensible foods that were relatively small and could be eaten with little preparation and stored snugly within the back pack he had stolen from Dudley's bedroom one evening.

He knew though, that if he headed into deeper wilderness, he would have to forage at some point. He knew a few things about edible plants from what he had scavenged in Privet Dr. and he figured that he could just as easily lift a fish from a river, or a rabbit from a bush, as he did a can of soup from a grocer's bag. Still, he reasoned, that he needed better information. Not to mention that he only knew how to prepare fish and not any other form of game. The warm months were all well and good, but he knew that when winter hit, he would be in definite trouble. He needed to acquire more skills.

By this point he realized that avoiding Normal habitations was not exactly feasible as he was still relatively young and inexperienced in the world, and towns and villages represented not only a food source and other potential supplies, but also potential knowledge bases in the way of libraries or mouth to mouth conversations he would listen in on discreetly, or overhearing radio and television broadcasts from peoples cars and windows.

His second problem was shelter.

He knew from his experiences so far that roofs, bushes and trees were obviously not going to cut it.

He found he rather liked the height and coverage from trees. He had a rolled up hammock that he had taken from number twelve's garbage can and repaired, as well as a rolled up blanket from a small towns church donation box with a few sweaters. This was not going to do forever, and he knew it. Trees were impractical bed places in the winter.

The third problem was cloths.

If he was going to go into an actual Normal's building like a store or a library, he would need to look less like the dirty ragamuffin that cleans his cloths in the occasional stream, falling apart and to big, to something that didn't scream runaway. He was 8 years old, going on 9 after all. He was also to skinny and short to even look his proper age.

No, that would not do at all.

It chaffed, that he still depended on something from the Normals, though he supposed that complete seclusion might be a bit of a pipe dream at the moment.
Harry reflected that he had only so much space on him, another problem.

He couldn't always carry around clean cloths all the time. He only had enough room for one extra set of cloths and those sweaters as it is. Then there was the necessity of more gear for the cold weather. His trainers were falling apart as it is.

Harry paced floated somewhere above a bit of farm area between Salfords and Tonbridge, (having had the sense to acquire a map before he left).

He muttered to himself, ideally crunching on an apple as he pondered his conundrum.

Finding and obtaining the cloths wouldn't be a problem of course, he could just steal them after all with his lifting abilities right off of laundry lines or shop windows, it was just storage.

He needed those survival books to better handle himself in the world. He needed to have cloths that didn't make him look suspicious when going into said buildings like libraries, which would be much more difficult, if at all possible, to steal from at a distance. He also of course, had no space for any of the books or other supplies he would steal anyway.

Then suddenly, the solution to his problem becomes suddenly clear.

Obviously flying and lifting couldn't be the only thing his Rush was capable of doing. His stories often spoke of great big things that had been stored inside tiny little things that would be perfect size for carrying on his person.

He remembered the story of A Sprig of Rosemary where a maiden had received 3 nuts, one each from the sun, moon and wind. They had held clothing that appeared when the nuts were cracked open, and the maiden had used it to bribe the bride of her errant love interest who had lost all memory of her. (1)

He reasoned that the tiny storage spaces must have contained clothing and such that had been shrunken down for easy storage. It was perfect for him, though he wasn't planning on whipping out any dresses any time soon to get some rich bloke to marry him, it still was a useful bit of fiction that lead him to an idea of a solution.

Shrinking and the obvious to follow necessity of enlarging it back to normal size, or even to something bigger, was the thing he would assume would take a lot of practice, that was for sure.

Luckily, he still had a few months left of good weather. He could go as he was, and practice during some secluded spot for an evening or two, rest, and then travel a bit and repeat the process, breaking it up with lifting food and such.

Harry nodded his head, rather pleased with his reasoning.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry eventually settled into a thicket about a mile between a small village called Goldspawn (2), and a spattering of farms. A close grouping of oaks became his temporary home for the next days as he set up camp. Here would be the first in a long line of similar stops that was to be his new training for the next few weeks. He just hoped that it didn't take him long to figure out how to do it.

He started on a stone first, usually about the size of his hand. He figured that he should first try to figure out how to make things small first, before he worried about going in the other direction.

This was indeed harder then he realized.
He at first, didn't get anywhere, and often ended up deforming, and sometimes outright exploding his rocks, which left him frustrated and covered in cuts. He quickly learned to put a bit of distance and cover between himself and his experiments.

It was on the outskirts of Cranbrook (3), by a lovely bit of pond under a large willow, that Harry finally realized were he had gone wrong.

He was still caught up in the notions of Normals, this time in regards to size and change, similar to how he was caught up in the notions of size and weight when he was learning Lifting. He realized that instead of imagining the rock to shrink, or imagining it as a smaller rock, he had to simply acknowledge that the rock merely existed at its current size at his whim. He had to simply believe that the rock could be any size at all and want it to be whatever he wanted it to be.

This was a novel change of perception again, and Harry patted himself on the back for figuring it out all on his own without the aid of a movie this time.

This time when he looked at the rock he merely desired it to be smaller and knew that it was in fact the size that he wanted. His Rush filled him with warmth and tingles and sure enough, after a brief wobble, the pink and grey stone sitting before him shrank to the size of a pebble.

The same trick he figured out for shrinking was applied to enlarging. Sizing, as he came to call it, was ridiculously easy, once he mastered the thought, feel and will of it. When he practiced for the first time on one of his valuable sweaters, the material sat, small and tiny in his palm, to small for even a Barbie doll.

He had fun experimenting with the sweater, and found that enlarging it to the size of a tent would definitely come in handy.

Pleased with himself, he made a brief stopover in Cranbrook to lift a few decent things from a local clothing shop, and stayed within the modest town, ducking away at night time to return to his willow tree and pond.

He stayed there for a week or so, the longest he had stayed in anyone place really. With his new cloths, and his pack hidden in the willow tree out of sight, Harry looked like any Normal boy, even if his hair was a bit wilder than other boy's hair. He was careful to not be on the streets during school time though, so as not to attract attention.

As he studied his books in the library, discreetly pocketing a few that looked helpful, he also took the time in playing tourist, a novel experience that he had never had. The Dursleys vacationed, but he was never allowed to go. He decided to take advantage of this opportunity.

It was as he was taking a lunch break, studying the various water and wind mills that clustered near the river Bout, rather liking the structures, that his eyes drifted by a small shop.

In the shop’s window were a number of various quaint bird houses, many in the shape of wind mills. Harry looked at them and was reminded of a story.

This fairy tale was of a prince that decided to observe a battle for ruler-ship among the animals. During this battle, there were only two contestants left, a snake and a bird. The snake, ready to strike, was foiled by the watching prince when he lopped its head off. In gratitude, he was gifted by the Bird king with a bundle which contained a surprise. He was commanded not to open this gift until he was in a place he wanted to be. After a bit of a kerfuffle with an irate giant, the man opened his gift and pulled out a castle from within the bag. The castle, once out of the packaging, quickly grew into
a large, real life one, and inside it was a maiden that he later married, and they then both lived in the castle together (4).

Harry smiled. While again, the whole maiden thing was somewhat useless, beyond the notion that people could probably be shrunk, and a castle was a bit much, certainly, but change out castle for, say, a small wooden bird house...it occurred to him that he now had a solution to his shelter problem as well.

Ooo ooo ooo

A/N: review and let me know what you think.

1: *A Sprig of Rosemary* is a Spanish fairy tale collected by Dr. D. Francisco de S. Maspons y Labros in *Cuentos Populares Catalans*. Andrew Lang included it in *The Pink Fairy Book*. 2: Goldspawn is made up from my head. 3: Cranbrook is a small town in Kent in South East England. 4: *The Battle of the Birds* is a Scottish fairy tale collected by John Francis Campbell in his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*.
The Boy and his First Meeting

Chapter Summary

Harry's port in a storm has an interesting resident.

Harry had decided to follow a river this time, instead of aimlessly soaring in whatever direction that caught his whim (or hasty escape of the occasional plane). The current river he was following soon joined with other rivers, and the sent on the air became more brackish, with a hint of brine. It wasn't until he consulted his map, after spying the sign of an approaching town dubbed Wick that he realized he was rather close to the English Channel.

Wick was a small town, with a population of only about 7000-8000 people or so. It was also one of two burghs within the county of Caithness, of which Wick was the county town. The town straddled the River Wick and extends along both sides of Wick Bay. (1)

The place had an air of age about it, the buildings stone, and bore the imprint of times before automobiles and such could still be remembered in the old walls and streets of the place, despite being on a main hwy.

There was a railway line and an airport as well, and Harry amused himself with hiding in a tree outside the airfield and watching the planes, very glad that he could fly. Depending on machines to escape the hold of gravity and not ones will for a time, seemed highly unpractical to Harry now, after flying for so long.

After that little amusement, Harry pulled out a plastic peanut butter jar from his backpack and shook the contents inside consideringly. Inside it was half full of tiny, thumb sized clothing items.

It had been a month since Harry had started Sizing. It took care of a lot of problems and opened up a lot of room in his pack.

Harry had wandered into the occasional toy store a time or two, lifting doll cloths and other little knickknacks. The sizing of these into larger, more usable items left Harry with a wider range of sources amongst the normals' communities for those times he ventured into towns.

His selected cloths sized into something that would fit him after a quick wash with a hose in a back lawn that was not being noticed, and he was off to the Wick Carnegie Library to scavenge some more books to size and add to his growing collection of thumbnail sized books stored in a small bamboo box with a copper clasp that he had taken a liking to one day and taken.

Harry spent a few days around Wick, visiting a heritage museum, lingering on the roofs of local bars, and generally enjoying himself. As he broadened his knowledge base and acquired supplies; Harry's favorite place by far was looking out over the stunning blue water of the sea, perched atop the remains of the Castle of Old Wick, or as the locals refer to it, the Old Man of Wick.

Harry found the wide expanse of water to be breath taking, and he rather wondered how long it would take him to cross it to the next land mass which was, according to his map, was either France or Belgium, depending on his whims.
He considered the expanse before him. He figured that if a Normal could swim the English Channel, and birds could fly the English Channel, then he too could cross, even if the idea was a bit nerve wracking; he had never crossed such a large expanse without some sort of handy landing spot.

Finally, after eyeing the occasional plane, he decided that he would make his usual night time travel, but keep high up and in the clouds. Lucky for him, he smelled a storm that would make its way inland in the next few days. This would be perfect cover for his flight from the Normals.

He floated down to the ground and walked back to the library, figuring that it would be open once he arrived there, and decided to see if he could find a map of France.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry had not expected the storm to move in so quickly. Perhaps it was close range to the sea, or perhaps an unexpected wind change, who knew? But Harry knew he was in trouble when he was nearly blown into the churning waters nearly 3 quarters of the way to the shores of his first ever out of country visit.

He was getting battered by the gale force winds, and he had long been soaked to the bone in chilly rain. Harry would later be grateful that he had taken the precaution in covering his backpack in the waterproof tarp he had snitched from a boater at Wick.

Through the downpour, the flying boy struggled to grimly maintain his focus; he needed to get to land.

A tree, a bush, hell, even a rock would be welcome at this point.

Harry sobbed in relief when a dark expanse of cliffs reared out of the gloom before his tired eyes.

Harry was tired and cold; he was sinking in fits and starts, for the first time since he had mastered flying, having a hard time maintaining his focus.

A glimmer of…well, he didn't know what it was really that caught his attention, put it was like a beacon of safety for the tired child. He gathered the last of his strength and shot towards the glimmer in the rock face.

This source was a tiny cave opening with a barely there jutting outcropping, that would have otherwise gone unnoticed but for whatever quality about it drew the boy's attention.

He shot into the opening and tumbled to the firm, stony ground with a tired sigh, slightly winded, but relieved beyond measure that he had actually made it.

Harry was jarred out of his relief, however, when a voice declared in the gloom.

"Well, that's something you don't see every day, boys shooting into ones vacation homes like they had a cannon in their arse pockets."

Harry achingly scrambled to his feet, and crouched defensibly as a small squat figure became clearer, previously unnoticed lanterns suddenly sprung to life, filling the cave with warm light.

Harry stared, he couldn't help it.

The stranger was small, smaller than him even, though not a child. He was rather grizzled, and looked rather old and sour. It was the olive green skin and the large, sharply pointed ears with tufts of grey, wiry hair between them that arrested his stunned amazement.
The stranger was also dressed in a night shirt, holding another lantern in gnarly clawed hands.

"What's the matter boy? You look as though you have never seen a Goblin before."

Harry got over his shock quickly enough and considered the goblin.

He knew that things in the fantasies he read could be applied to him because he was an Abnormal. It never occurred to him, he admitted, that the creatures actually mentioned in the tales could be potentially nonfictional. Still, it seemed somewhat logical to admit that perhaps more than the happenings in the fictions, and possibly some of the characters themselves might have some basis in truth.

That meant that this goblin, though looking slightly different then some of the illustrations in some of the books he read, was a goblin, and therefore an Abnormal to.

Frankly, he knew it would be impossible for him to be the only Abnormal in the entire world, he had just never meant any before, and being a solitary sort of boy, never thought to seek any out, since he had been doing quite well for himself since discovery of his status.

There was also another conclusion to be drawn from this goblin. If the goblin was an Abnormal, and Harry, who was definitely different then the goblin, an Abnormal, then that meant that there were potentially many different varieties of Abnormals out in the world.

So what was he then? He figured he wasn't any garden variety human at least.

Harry finally mentally shook himself from the conundrum. Whatever his origins or species, it made little difference really, he would still be living as he did now, and he would still be the same Harry that he was fighting his way through the storm.

The only problem now lay in whether this face to face with other Abnormals would lead to complications. After all, many of the figures and species alluded to in the tales he had read so far were very powerful and/or dangerous.

Said danger that he was not keen in being directed towards him.

The another practical thought.

What if Abnormals were organized enough to not be too keen on their children wandering the planet without parental guidance?

He knew, despite his own experiences, that Normals in general were very particular about the safety of children in general, and he had no evidence that the rules that applied to children of Normals wouldn’t apply to Abnormals.

So there was potential headaches not just from the dangerous Abnormals, but also the potentially helpful ones as well.

The Goblin was eying him suspiciously now, his face growing sourer if possible.

Harry quickly scrambled for a viable lie.

"I am sorry for disturbing you sir, I was caught outside on my way to my grandmother's house that isn't to far from here, and was caught by the storm. My vision is not the best you see," Harry pointed to his glasses, "and I stumbled and fell off a cliff and landed on a ledge into some bushes," Harrys bedraggled appearance would hopefully back this up, "then I was blown by a gust of wind into your
fine cave, I am sorry for intruding sir, I could try to climb out and returned to -" (2).

"No, I'm not about to send some scrawny runt out into the storm to get blown into the sea next. Consider yourself lucky that the wind blew you into a cave with a goblin with a decent disposition and not the wretched waves," the goblin interrupted, "now follow me and I will show you a place you can stay until the storm passes then I will see you as far as your grandmother's property."

Harry was lead down a winding tunnel that grew steadily shorter, though more ornate, with carvings of what looked like goblin battles.

Harry though, was rather more fascinated by the lanterns.

The goblin would either light or extinguish a torch with a wave of his hand, and some occasional muttering under his breath that he assumed was the being's own mother tongue.

A few of the stories he read talked of enchanted fires, but it didn't really register until the moment that he saw it in action.

Now that would be handy, but was it something that was akin to the torches and lanterns, much like other magical objects he had read about in stories, or was it flame created by the goblin used on the torches and lanterns? and was it something unique only to goblins?

Harry, somewhat tired, cold and weary of being in the stranger's presence, decided to figure it out later, at the moment he turned his attention back to his host.

He was lead to a small stone room with a round wooden door embedded in the opening, painted a dull greyish colour.

The door was opened to reveal a small, rather lush sitting room done in rich shades of blues, golds, and silvers. It reminded him vaguely of a Victorian sitting room that he had seen in a magazine once, though the furniture was smaller, obviously goblin size, and had an abundance of sharp projections made of precious metals and bone then he was comfortable with.

Harry took a seat on one of the chairs and accepted the grudging tea that was offered. The goblin only stated a stern "sit and remain quiet" before picking up a book from a small pile by his chair and returning to what he was reading with a grunt and a sip of some amber coloured liquid that smoked vaguely.

Harry took in the room, and had to say, it was strangely cozy, despite the owner being less than warm. But then again, he had, quite literally, dropped in on him uninvited; not that it was the young boy's fault of course.

Harry eyed the books with interest. Having an actual book that belonged to an abnormal, potentially written by another abnormal, without the question marks of abnormal-ness being interpreted from the views of Normal writers, would be quite useful.

But then again, this was another abnormal. Harry had read fairy tales about characters that steal from powerful people and creatures and it not always ending well. Would stealing from a goblin have a similar consequence? After all, he was too young to be thinking about giving up his first born or being cursed as a consequence.

Harry continued to eye the books thoughtfully, mulling over the possibilities.

The goblin, at some point, while Harry was deep in thought, looked at the boy over the top of his book.
He mentally snorted. The boy was obviously not going to grandma's house and back. He had the well-worn look of one who had been on the road for a while. His cloths and muggle backpack were worn and the colors were faded. The boy himself was lean and surprisingly pale for one who must have been outdoors for quite some time. His hair was a shaggy wild mop of dark hair that was tangled and gave the boy a rather untamed look, already past his shoulders. No mother or father with scissors in hand had touched that boy's head in a while.

"I am Ragnarok," the goblin finally introduced himself reluctantly.

The boy turned his gaze from the pile of books by the goblin's feet and gave a shy smile and said "my names Harry, sir," the boy cocked his head, "Ragnarok? like the name of the mythological Norse end of the world?"

Harry had added the last bit as he figured this was the type to have respectful connotations. Harry had always had excellent instincts in how to be around adults and avoid the least way to anger them.

Ragnarok gave a snort of amusement, so the boy appears to be educated at least, and replied.

"Yes, my father was rather fond of human stories of ultimate destruction," he gave a toothsome smile as he mentally added to himself, 'and many a wizard has known the true definition of my name when I have been crossed.'

Ragnarok noted the boy's eyes shifting to his book stack again with a certain grudging amusement, faint though it was. At least the boy displayed some sense. The boy had been completely oblivious to the various treasures he had strewn around the place like so much knick-knack (which it was to him at least, being a rather opulent sort) and there was no lust for gold or silver or jewel in the boy.

A goblin, especially one so esteemed as him, should be able to sense a lover of treasure; after all, goblins were lovers of treasure, among other things like blood, gold, battle and trickery. Goblins could smell greed from a person within minutes of meeting them, and this boy didn't have it.

He could smell something else about the boy though, and that was a heavy air of potential.

No mere human should have been able to break though those goblin wards, whether purposefully or by accident (the latter of which he believed to be the case) and so young at that!

The goblin considered the boy, the boy and his thirst for knowledge.

"You are interested in the books I take it," the goblin grunted finally, his own book back infront of his face.

Harry started and straightened. So the old goblin had noticed? Well, now that the subject was brought up, Harry considered, his brain quickly weaving a potential plan.

"Yes sir, I rather enjoy stories, though will read anything that crosses my fancy, particularly if it is useful or gives me ideas that ends up helping me in the future. Since you are…different from the other authors that I normally read; I am curious about what sort of books goblins would write about."

The goblin huffed and then after a moment of silence and page turning, the goblin stated suddenly,

"I'll give you one of my books, in return though, you have to promise me something."  

Harry was immediately wary. He remembered stories of characters being tricked, or accepting stupidly, a deal with another character that usually ended up with the receiver of said deal regretting it at some point.
"What something would this be?" he asked cautiously.

The goblin gave another grudging point in the boys favor. At least he wasn't foolish to agree right away, as most children and some adults would be inclined to do when it came to something they desired.

"Nothing that will cost you your freedom, your morals, your body or anything from it; It will merely be a favor, a simple favor of anything that I require, though you are free to refuse if it infringes on any of the above stated exceptions. This favor will be paid at any time within your lifetime at my leisure."

Harry considered the offer carefully. It seemed reasonable, though he wondered what exactly he could offer a goblin. The goblin clearly could Rush all on his own, and Harry was just a boy, with no obvious money (he certainly didn't look rich).

"What can I offer you? I don't really have anything…"

"You will," the goblin interrupted briskly, "now, grab a book from the pile before I change my mind, or don't accept at all, either way it is no skin of my arse."

With that, he turned back to his book.

Harry bit his lip, but then, eventually, decided that whatever this something the goblin thought he would have was something that was far off, and there was no guarantee in that in the first place. Chances were he would probably never see the goblin ever again. The deal was reasonable, there was less risk on Harry's part in this then on the goblin, and he would be gaining a book from the deal that belonged to the first other abnormal that he had ever met.

"You have a deal."

Ragnarok smirked with satisfaction behind his book, unseen.

Ooo ooo ooo

The book Harry had chosen was much to Harry's horror, in a language that was not recognizable. It was filled with harsh jagged lines and squiggles. Harry had not had much choice in what he had chosen. The goblin had merely growled for him to be quick about his choice, and Harry had complied nervously, and had grabbed the first book on the top of the pile, a dusty, slightly thick tome of faded dark leather with golden gilt page edges which, despite the age, still shone warmly in the candle light.

Harry had snuck out of the cave after the storm had past and while the goblin had been snoozing in his chair, feeling somewhat cheated but that he had learned something very valuable from the encounter.

This taught him to be extra cautious, particularly with other Abnormals, and he vowed to approach any others with a better head to potential craftiness in the near or far future.

Ooo ooo ooo

A/n: (1) Wick is an actual location in the UK. I got the info from Wikipedia. (2) Harry takes inspiration for his unbelieved lie from the fairy tale, "Little Red Ridinghood."
July 4, Harry is 8 years old, France…

It was about a week after Harry had left his first encounter with another abnormal. He had to admit, despite the goblin's rather surely nature, and getting tricked, he had felt a certain fascination and excitement with the revelation that he was not alone in being an Abnormal. Harry was in no way arrogant in thinking that he was the only one, but some part of him had worried that he might not ever meet one.

After his encounter with the goblin, he decided to start writing about his adventures and had even done a few simple drawings, though not a masterpieces; of Ragnarok holding a book in one hand with a grouchy look on his face. He wanted to keep a record of the peoples and things he may meet during his journey, and the places or things he may find. He felt that these journals would become handy someday.

Anyway, back to the present.

When he had been in a library last, before he had begun his rainy journey that lead him to the goblin, he had acquired a book that talked about the various provinces and cities in France, which proved useful in terms of understanding the setting he now found himself in, but didn't help Harry's first
stumbling block in his time in France, which came in the presence of directional signs and peoples that spoke a language that was decidedly not English.

The first thing Harry did to solve this issue was to take as many teach yourself French books he could find. Despite being a good learner with Rushing, he found that learning a language was decidedly harder, though Harry was determined that he wouldn't give in, he was going to learn. He figured he might as well get used to trying to learn other languages, since he would most likely end up in other places that had other languages and customs that he was going to have to study to keep himself unnoticed and cognizant of possible dangers. Further, if he came across any other Abnormals, he wanted to be able to communicate with them. As evidenced by the book that he got from the goblin, he was not naive enough to believe that he would be as lucky as he was in finding an Abnormal that can speak English.

Harry was especially determined to spend time in France in the meanwhile and not just because of the temperate climate but also for a simple personal reason.

The first ever time that Harry had been exposed to the knowledge that there were desirable places outside of Privet Dr. was when he was 5 years old and sweeping the kitchen while his aunt was gushing to his uncle about how Mrs. Number 5 across the street had won a trip to France in a lottery at their church.

His first lesson about foreign culture came from Petunia's lauding of the fine foods, wine, the breathtaking landscapes, the high fashions and, of course, the home to Paris, one of the most romantic places on Earth (here she would throw coy looks at her husband who would huff and bury himself deeper into his paper).

Harry had been too young to really understand most of what she said, but he had been fascinated by the idea of such places existing outside of the humdrum of his little cupboard, Number 4, and Privet Dr. itself.

This was perhaps why, years later, and flying free, as he made his decision about where to explore, he had decided that France was where he wanted to go, as it was the catalyst of giving him the ability to dream of places outside of what he knew, and he was grateful to the country of that gift, even if he had only been aware of a few bare essentials of the place when he was younger.

Ooo ooo ooo

2 months into France, Harry is now 9, September 4 the Province of Picardy…

He hummed to himself as he bypassed the introduction of his France Fantastic! A Traveler's Spectacle (1), flipping pages to see if he could find specific information for where he was.

He was 3 days into Picardy, as he stood atop a power line pole, hidden by some trees, with a sign below and across the moderately busy road that read:

Abbeville

He knew that he had been following the Somme River, figuring it was as better a directional choice as any, a habit he had taken to now, as following rivers inevitably had habitations or at least something interesting nearby, or as a good resource of fish and fresh water in the less habitable places.

It didn’t take long to find where he was.

He turned to the offered page number beside the name.
“...Abbeville is a commune in the Somme department in Picardie in northern France located on the Somme River, 20 km (12 mi) from its modern mouth in the English Channel. The majority of the town is located on the east bank of the Somme, as well as on an island. It is located at the head of the Abbeville Canal, and is 45 km (28 mi) northwest of Amiens.”(2).

He hummed thoughtfully, according to the book, it used to be very picturesque but the bombings in the second world war destroyed many of the sites (2) though there were still a few things he could explore if he was feeling touristy, such as St. Vulfrin’s church, The Boucher de Perthes Museum, The church of the Holy Sepulcher situated in the heart of the old town center which was situated in the now unused bell tower, and a monument called the Aux Morts (2).

He was somewhat tempted by the Boucher de Perthes museum, which features art work and other artifacts from the 16th century onward, and other exhibitions that change every few months (2), he had never really been to one that was primarily featuring artistic displays, and since he journeyed, he’d come to appreciate the aesthetic things in the world nearly as much as he had exploring his abilities and reading his stories. He felt that it gave his wanderings greater depth and appreciation outside of the necessities of survival from day to day.

He decided to spend a few days there then continue on.

He had to admit, he enjoyed himself, and even went to see the other sites with the Aux Morts being his favorite. He marveled at how a person can create such images from mere rock, knowing that he would never be able to do such things, and decided that if people without special powers can do such extraordinary things with just simple tools, stone and infinite patience, that the mundane world in this context wasn’t quite so bad.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry had ventured to a few more places during his time in the country, meandering in and out of cities, towns and villages.

Inspired by his time in Abbeville, he took the time to really appreciate the art that France had to offer. From sneaking into the most affluent of galleries after hours (he had found that if he used his rush, even passively, like having an apple bobbing behind him, he could disrupt Normal Technology like video cameras and alarm systems for a brief time) to the museums, to perching on the heads of statues, monuments and other sculpture, as well as architecture. He had even observed from hidden spots in trees, bushes and dark ally's as artists painted on their canvas.

Harry also made odd little goals while he journeyed, such as perching on all 37 of Paris’ main bridges (3), eating the largest, gaudiest Éclair and drinking fancy coffee's that his uncle would complain about invading his favorite coffee shops back in Surrey, which he did and promptly became rather sick, promising himself that he would never do that again.

There were times that he thought excitedly he might have come across places that had Abnormals.

There were pockets of spaces that he stumbled across at times that made his skin tingle, and his Rush flex and flow restlessly, and sometimes he thought he would see empty expanses of fields or garbage infested, rundown buildings waver and reveal snippets of scenery and people that should not be there, but always he lost sight of it, and he had not figured out how to enter those places, so he would eventually move on, frustrated.

After that, he decided to retreat to more rural settings, so he often chose to fly over rivers that were bordered by thick forests, fields and wild lands.
He had been in Paimpont Forrest, having decided on the area to temporarily set up camp for a few weeks, if the place looked good for staying, to focus on his studies.

Paimpont Forrest was in the French commune of Paimpont, near the city of Rennes in Brittany (4). He had made a brief stop in Rennes before venturing back in the wild, to Lift as many books as he could find on the country's legends and mythologies and popular fantasies and comic books. He reasoned that there might be some hidden key that he hadn't discovered yet to getting into what he had dubbed the Hidden Places. He hoped to find that key by delving into the material. He also thought it might be prudent to be aware of what exactly he may come across in the local Abnormals, having learned from his experience with the goblin.

He had visited a few of the local tourist sites such as Merlin's tomb and Abbot Guillotin's oak (4) but had not felt any stirring from his Rush and was unsure of the validity of the sites as Normals were going by myths and legends perpetuated by other Normals, despite that there could be truths within them after all, and likely if the stories behind those sites were real, the Normals, being what they are, most likely may have got them wrong.

It was retreating to deeper and deeper into the broad leaf trees, oaks and beeches mainly, with areas of conifers hugging him closer and closer in his low flights, giving him plenty of maneuvering practice- that he quite literally stumbled into one of those, until now, un-breachable Hidden Places thanks to an attack by an irate group of territorial birds.

The sensation had been akin to flying into a giant invisible balloon that, for a moment, felt like the air itself was going to ricochet him backwards, only to finally give and melt around him to nothingness when his Rush gave an odd sharp ping that he had never felt before, and disappeared just as quickly, and sending him tumbling into a large dark purplish bush that promptly tried to eat him for his troubles.

That introduction to what he would later determine through his readings was most likely Brocéliande (5).

He was uncertain what the carnivorous plant was, it had broad, jagged edged leaves, leaking stinging mucus-like sap from writing tentacles that wrapped him up tighter with each struggle. It was his second meeting with an Abnormal, though he suspected that it wasn't sentient, as far as he could figure, like the alien plant that Seymour had to deal with in Little Shop of Horrors (6).

He was finally able to escape when he decided to try creating fire.

He had experimented already with his camp fires, inspired by all the references in his source materials, so many references in myths and legends like the fire rats from Chinese folklore (7) the Balrog from Lord of the Rings (8), the mentions of Psychokinetic powers like those from various comic books and other fantasy stories just to name a few was when he had decided it was most likely something he could do with Rushing, and what he had been practicing since his arrival in France, though without much success.

That is until his encounter with the purple man eating plant he latter would dub Audrey (6.5), that desperation was a good motivator and quick teacher it seems.

He was grateful that the plant didn't scream as it was burned quickly and efficiently by his flames. He was relieved that the fire didn't spread to the rest of the foliage, this flame seeming to only be concerned with what it had originally been set aflame to, which was odd, but otherwise economical, so he didn't look a gift horse in the mouth in this quarter.
He had stayed as high up as he dared to go above the tree tops after that, while still not breaking the barrier that surrounded the Hidden Place, something he could instinctively sense somehow.

From his vantage point, he could see that the expanse that the barrier covered was greater then what his maps of Paimpont forest covered, it was through this exploration that he determine that a Hidden Place could manipulate spacial dimensions.

Brocéliande, according to a passage in one of his books, is a notable place of legend because of its uncertain location, unusual weather, and its ties with Arthurian Romance, most notably a magical fountain and the tomb of the legendary figure Merlin, the sights of which the Normals claimed to be in the regular part of Paimpont Forrest, which is thought, itself, to be the legendary forest (5).

The place was said to be heavily magical, hard to find, and home to magical beings such as fairies and has also been reputed to be near King Arthur's palace and the site of a mill where King Arthur battles a strange bull-like animal (5).

In the time that it had taken him to find the place, he had come across more plants and wild life that were definitely abnormal as far as he could determine.

There were trees of different colors, some with bark, branches, or fruit that appeared to be made of precious metals, gleaming invitingly in the sun (9), or trees that seemed to move in a manner that was not by the wind, such as rather ugly willow like trees (10) that flicked a black bird with three red glowing eyes (11) into a birch in a manner humans do an irritating insect.

He had seen flowers that were so beautiful that it nearly made him weep to gaze upon, how he would imagine would happen if he gazed upon a god before he was immolated in their power (12), daffodils that honked at one another, and fire breathing toad stools that hissed viciously (13).

He knew it would be sometime before he worked up the nerve to experiment what was safe to eat.

Harry's explorations didn't lead him to finding Arthur's castle, or a mill, though he did find a small cave that appeared to be uninhabited, surrounded by thick mundane oak tree's, with a clear running river near by.

The trees and plants around where he lived seemed fairly benign, from what he had observed carefully, before making his camp and further ridiculously pleased that, while the nearby grove of apple trees tended to throw there apples and snicker among themselves when they hit something (14), usually or some passing animal, they were normal enough looking apples that seemed edible and where quite delicious once he worked up the nerve to try one.

There were three main rivers that bisected the forest that were sourced from a modest sized lake that was at the very center of the forest. Since he had yet to meet any sentient Abnormals (though he often wondered about the trees at times) he had, like the Audrey, chose to name them.

The north river he called Wendy, The South River he called John, and the west river, that flowed into a sort of sharp curve, he called Hook (15) and the central lake he dubbed Balar (16).

The waters held just as much fascinatingly abnormal things as the land.

When he had become short on food stores and tired of thrown apples about 2 weeks into his time in the forest, he had decided to venture to the closest river, Wendy, to see what it had to offer in edibles, particularly fish, as he had grown fond of both fishing (the mundane variety as well as his own) and eating them in his journey.

Wendy was cool and clear, with breaks of colorful rocks and, he was pleased to note, the occasional
glide of rather large and small fish of various colours. Local wild life such as ducks and geese of the variety he had seen in his travels through France so far also made use of the waters, and he knew were excellent for eating.

He made a habit of collecting a few of the birds, which he Lifted towards him and quickly broke there necks, never taking more then one or two birds every other trip or so, having become proficient at cleaning wild game at this point.

The fish, he had come to discover, were lager then what he was used to seeing, though he reckoned that was because of the magical nature of the forest. The water was also especially clear and clean, untouched by human pollution as well.

The abnormal fauna of the rivers and lake he would later explore after Wendy, had lead to Harry discovering the largest creature in the forest that he had seen so far.

An honest to goodness dragon.

From what Harry had been able to tell from his books, he had possibly come across the local variety of the mythical creature as it seemed fairly similar to the description:

"… Garguiem, not to be confused with gargoyle, was allegedly a dragon with 4 legs and wings. This water-spouting dragon (more like a serpent dragon, because of its long snake like body) appeared in the Seine River in France. It was said to terrorize boats and flood the land. In the legend, Saint Romain, the archbishop of Rouen, lured the monster to shore using a convict, and then made a cross with his fingers to tame the monster. He then led it into town where it was slaughtered. Some accounts said it was burned. The accounts of burning said that neither the monster's head or neck would burn, so they were mounted on the town's cathedral to display God's power.

The creature was then said to have been carved onto buildings to be used as a water drainage, therefore creating the modern gargoyle. It is similarly accounted that they have no relation other than their water-spouting abilities, leading to the words' similarities..." (17).

Harry could attest to seeing four web footed, triple joined legs like that of a frog, the large serpentine body, and bat-like diaphanous wings. The water spouting was more like accurate, and deadly jets of water that it would shoot from its mouth to stun the large, razor backed, grey feathered flamingo's that the great creatures enjoyed eating, along with frogs and other small creatures in the shallows. The birds would usually scatter, leaving their stunned fellows to be dragged off by the dragons prehensile black tongue that would drag it bellow the depths.

Luckily for Harry, the few times he had caught the creatures eye, the navy and green scaled creature seemed to be indifferent to his presence, and primarily stuck to Balar, and he never saw more then one or two at a time.

Ooo ooo ooo

2 months into his stay at Brocéliande, what he felt finally comfortable enough to theorize was indeed the place he was in, he was out exploring.

By this time he had become proficient enough in drawing that he felt comfortable in going out and sketching more of the the abnormal creatures and plants he had been discovering, naming ones that he had not found references to, whether they were dangerous, passive, edible, etc.

So far he had come across the breathtaking sight of Unicorns, fire-breathing squirrels (19), creatures that looked like a cross between a bear and a bug (20), and porcupine-like creatures with quills like
It was the winged serpents (22) that he had found, much to his delight, were the first sentient Abonromals in the forest that he knew of for sure as they were capable of talking.

Granted, their reference of communication appeared to mainly be tied to the cares and perspectives of serpents, but Harry was still delighted at the discovery, and the creatures seemed to share his appreciation. Better yet, through them he learned that he some how apparently already had the power to speak in the manner of serpents, or so the leader of the flock informed him, and he should be able to talk to any serpent he wanted, even if what he heard sounded like English, though after awhile, he was able to detect the barest hint of hissing if he focused an strained enough.

It was not uncommon that the local flock would dance around him in the skies and share the best places to hunt fat mice and birds, or to avoid their local predators. They also had a keen instinct for determining plants that were helpful to Harry either medicinal or generally edible, as they didn't relegate themselves to flesh alone, though it was preferred.

Ooo ooo ooo

He knew that he had about maybe another month left of sketching materials and notebooks before he would have to make the flight back to Rennes to get some more.

He felt, somehow instinctual, that he would be able to find Brocéliande again, so he wasn't all that worried about not being able to return, though he would eventually feel the need to journey again. Brocéliande was fascinating, but he was used to traveling. He had already stayed longer then he ever had anywhere since he started flying. So he decided that he would continue on his travels as soon as he ran out of sketching material.

He was still rather fond of the place though, and felt if there was anyplace that could be closest to feeling like a home, it was this Hidden Place, a place that he would visit again.

He followed through with this decision not long after, only lingering long enough to gather food, secure his cave against the local wildlife, and say his goodbyes to the Winged Serpents, and the Garguiem, whom he had eventually struck up a conversation with after his success with the Winged Serpents, though the creatures was rather boring to talk to, going on and on about this and that food or sunbeam or mating or other.

Ooo ooo ooo

By the time he had left it was close to December and Harry decided to continue his journey further south, taking full advantage of the more temperate climates.

According to his maps, France was bordered by Spain, which he thought was southerly enough. He decided that he would spend some time there.

His route to Spain was flying through the provinces of France that meant the Atlantic sea, aiming for the Bay of Biscay were he would cross into Spain.

Along the way, he hit local libraries to get more maps, guide books, folklore, etc.

His journey was, as usual, high up in the clouds or undercover of darkness, and was uneventful and, as he finally found himself soaring over Cantabria, he wondered what new sights and adventures, and better yet, Abnormals he would find there?
Chapter End Notes

A/n:

(1) A book title I made up, (2) Abbeville, Wikipedia references. (3) France, Wikipedia references. (4) Paimpont Forrest Wikipedia references. (5) Brocéliande, Wikipedia references. (6) Little Shop of Horrors movie reference, (6.5) Name of the plant from the previous mentioned movie. (7) Fire Rats, Google. (8) Self-explanatory. (9) reference from The Twelve Dancing Princesses a German fairy tale originally published by the Brothers Grimm in 1812. (10) Whomping Willow from cannon. (11) Kuroshitsuji reference. (12) Flower version I made up based on what happens to mortals when they lay eyes on the true form of the gods from Greek mythology. (13) made up plant. (14) the apple trees from The Wizard of Oz movie reference. (15) Peter Pan reference. (16) a reference from J. R.R Tolkin's verse from Minor places in Beleriand Wikipedia article and was "An ocean inlet of the Belegaer south of Beleriand, fed by the River Sirion. It was presumably created in the cataclysms that accompanied the struggles of the Valar with Morgoth long before recorded history. The Isle of Balar was a large island in the bay" (Wikipedia quote). (17) Garguiem, a mythical creature from French Mythology, the description in the story is from Gargouille, a Wikipedia reference. (18) birds I made up. (19) Taken from Xiaolin Showdown animated television show, episode 41 "The Birds of Paradise." They were a tribe of fire breathing squirrels that took the character Jack hostage and are later defeated by the character Kimiko. (20) Dungeons and Dragons Game reference. (21) made up animal. (22) from various mythologies such as Greek and Aztec, as well as from many fantasy stories and games such as Dungeons and Dragons.
First week of December, Harry 9 years old, San Sebastian, Spain…

Harry, while missing Brocéliande and being around fellow Abnormals, even if they were mostly magic animals, was glad to be traveling again.

He had made a brief stop in a small town in France as he headed further south towards his latest destination and resupplied himself with sketch pads, pencils, and even charcoal, curious to experiment with various drawing materials. With all the various sketching he had done while in the Hidden Place, by this point Harry’s skills had grown enough in drawing that he was able to render more than passable pieces, and, upon occasion, had even sold a sketch here and there, though he rarely, if ever, used the money he earned from them. He was more pleased by praise for his skills as conformation of his growth more than anything, especially for a boy who had received rarely, if ever, and praise with the Dursleys.

Harry entered Spain into the first week of December having crossed along the coast of the Bay of Biscay, enjoying the salty tang of the ocean air and the beautiful sea side scenery as he lazily soared through the skies with a wash of stars at his back, and sometimes reflected back to him in a carpet of seething sparkles beneath him. such sights were what reminded Harry why he loved being an Abnormal.

One afternoon, while enjoying a light lunch just before his crossing in a lush field of wild flowers with a stream filled with cool running water chuckling to itself nearby, Harry perused the latest book he had got in furthering his traveling education.

According to a passage he read about Spain’s geography:

"…Spain is located on the Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe. Its mainland is bordered to the south and east by the Mediterranean Sea except for a small land boundary with Gibraltar; to the
north and north east by France, Andorra, and the Bay of Biscay; and to the west and northwest by Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean. It is one of three countries (Morocco, France) to have both Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines. Spain’s 1,214 km (754 mi) border with Portugal is the longest uninterrupted border within the European Union…” (1).

There was also mention of the Balearic Islands, which were also part of Spanish territories, situated somewhat south easterly from his current position in a tree outside San Sebastian. They sounded interesting, as did a few other places, so for Spain, Harry decided that he would do a lazy criss-cross across the country, he hadn't completely decided yet, especially as Spain was the second largest country in western Europe, so he had a lot of exploring to do if he wanted.

Since he had been sticking strictly rural so much lately, he decided that a few visits to some major cities wouldn't go amiss either, and he would start with San Sebastien.

Ooo ooo ooo

San Sebastien, 1 day later…

Harry sat in at the base of a fountain in the city's busy downtown district, sipping some juice as he perused the Chapter in his guide book about San Sebastien (2).

According to his book, the city is also called Saint Sebastien by the French, and Donostia, the inhabitants primarily referred to them signally as Donostiarrar. The city itself was quite populous, so it made it easy for Harry, in his semi-best cloths, to fade into the background and just perch somewhere and people watch, or to venture into one of the many stores and Lift a few things discreetly to be shrunk and added to his supplies.

Finding English speakers wasn't all that hard either, if he so chose, as San Sebastien's main economic activities was in commerce and tourism, so there was always someone around he could ask questions from, if he so chose.

The weather was also pleasant, sitting at about 12 degrees Celsius, only requiring him to wear a long sleeved shirt. Not as warm as Brocéliande, but still better than the snowy bitter cold of Surrey. It was actually quite refreshing and only added to his experience, making his long walks more enjoyable.

In the early morning, just as the sun was peeking over the horizon, Harry went on a flight, taking in a panoramic view of the Bay of La Concha, marveling at the bay's pale golden sands gilded like red gold in the rising sun, the clear, calm waters. He had a picnic on a bit of tree studded rocky outcropping that sat in the middle of the mouth of the bay, watching the occasional boaters on the waters or people walking along the shore. He had to agree with his book that it really was picturesque, and spent some time sketching the scenery.

According to his book, the city had various districts, particularly after the demolition of the city’s walls in 1863, so Harry decided that he would spend a week or so exploring the various districts. He wanted to thoroughly take in everything. He never really took the time to fully explore a city he passed through before. It was also possible that he may even run into another one of those Hidden Places that he couldn't enter or rightly see properly for some reason. Something he was curious in exploring further once he figured out how exactly he was able to enter. He decided he would start the next day.

Day 2 in Saint Sebastien…

The first district he decided to explore was Parte Vieja (Old Town) which is the traditional core area of the city.
There wasn't overly much to see in this district. There was a small fishing and recreation port, with two-floor picturesque houses lined under the front-wall of mount Urgull, as well as a fair amount of bars, though they were apparently more favored by the tourists then the locals. It wasn't bad, but not overly interesting either.

Harry did spend some time zooming around Mount Urgull though, and spent the night there, writing his thoughts so far in one of his journals, adding the last details on a sketch of one of the house he had drawn.

*Day 3 in Saint Sebastien…*

The next district that Harry decided to explore was Antiguo, which stands at the west side of the city beyond the Miramar Palace and was a population nucleus in the city that caters to services and tourism. Harry was able to find a few interesting bookstores that provided English as well as local books.

Harry actually enjoyed a brief game of chess with a bearded man named Angelo, and explored an old monastery.

After that, he went to Amara Zahara distinct, the core of which is the *Easo Plaza*, with the railway terminal of Euskotren closing the square at its south. He tromped through the marshes at the left of the River Urumea, and enjoyed a spot of fishing nad picking wild onion out of sight of the Normals before calling it a night.

*Day 4 in Saint Sebastien…*

According to the old man who he'd played chess with the previous day, muttering into his black knight, Amara Beri, or just Amara, was "The district that harbors the main road entrance to the city, with Donostia's central bus station being located between the roundabout and the river, Plaza Pio XII…" (2) as well as having one of the best little bread shops in the city, which Harry had to agree, had some excellent bread, but otherwise primarily housing a lot of business offices, so Harry didn't spend long there.

He also visited Gros, which is a district built on sandy terrain across the river, and had a fairly active commercial activity, which, according to a pamphlet he had found by a newspaper stand, was recently boosted by the presence of the Kursaal Congress Centre. Harry spent some time wandering the center, which looked like two translucent glass cubes, and according to the indulgent concierge on his smoke break out back, has been known to host up to 300 events and 600,000 people a year (3).

That was more than the amount of people Privet Dr.! It always boggled his mind sometimes, the amount of people that could gather in one place. Harry had spent the rest of the day, pretending to be visiting the building with his older cousin, father, brother, mother, aunt, etc. and got to stroll through a Star Trek Convention, a minor political get together which had a really good lobster salad, and a dentist's retreat where he was trapped for 30 horrifying minutes by a British dentistry couple that lectured him on the finer points of cavity fighting, and the horror stories of neglecting to brush ones teeth, and was given a roll of sugar free mints, free bright blue tooth brush and a small tube of toothpaste for his trouble. He made his escape with warnings to floss playing in his ears.

*Day 5 in Saint Sebastien…*

On his fifth day, Harry explored Aiete district's Bakearen Etxea or Peace Memorial House, and then ventured on to Egia district on the right side of the Urumea beyond the train station, ignoring the old cigarette factory, and wandering through Cristina Enea Park, enjoying the various plants on display.
He also paid a visit to the city cemetery, Polloe, at the north-east fringes of the district, wondering with a small flare of sadness where his parents were buried. His aunt had never taken him. He knew they had died while driving drunk and his aunt and uncle hated them, but he hoped that they at least were given a grave stone, like the people buried in Polloe.

He finished the day off in a large district to the east of the city called Intxaurrondo and ate his dinner on the roof of the farmhouse Intxaurrondo Zar, a National Monument that had been around since the mid-17th century.

*Day 6 and 7 in Saint Sebastien…*

Growing bored of his district, by district exploration by this point, Harry decided to round off his last two days by focusing on some of the more touristy locations, feeling he'd gotten enough of a feel of the local populous. So he visited San Sebastien's Cathedral, curiously watching a service, he walked along the Maria Christina bridge, admiring the statues rising from the bridge's support struts, and watched a football game.

By the time the sun had set, and the stars were peeking out in the wee hours close to midnight, Harry rose into the sky above the city and continued on his journey to explore Spain.

Ooo ooo ooo

*December 20th, Spain…*

Harry had landed as soon as the first drops of rain had wet his nose.

The following deluge had Harry huddled unhappily in on himself as he trudged through the mud of a seemingly endless rocky field of jagged rocks and scrub plants.

He had left his pack about a 5 minute flight a ways in a copse of trees at the base of some cliffs where he had made camp for a few days to restock his food supplies with local game and to study his Spanish from a few books he'd acquired, and read up on a few local legends and myths.

The rain had come on suddenly, having not expected it with the clear skies that morning, so he'd left everything behind while he went to hunt.

He didn't know how long he wandered in what he thought was the direction of his camp. He was so miserable that he didn't notice the tingle of his Rush responding to a magical barrier. The slight resistance Harry felt he thought to be a strong gust of wind blowing against him.

It was then he spotted something looming ahead of him in the rain, briefly illuminated in the sudden rake of lightening cross the sky.

It was a castle. A castle that sat atop a small steep rocky hill, surrounded on either side by jagged toothed rocks.

"Well…" Harry mused out loud, "If that isn't the set of something forbidding, I'll eat Dudley's socks."

Harry knew enough that such settings as what was presented before him was often an opener for a few of his favorite stories where something sinister awaits the unwary traveler or hero.

Still, he really had no choice, there was no other shelter, and he couldn't risk flying in this storm. He needed a place to at least await the storm to be over then he would leave quickly to return to finding his camp.
Seeing that there was really no choice, Harry allowed himself to hover at least a few feet off the ground so he wouldn't be encumbered by the rocky, nearly impassable terrain, and ascended the short trip to the castle.

Once he was standing before the empty maw of where he assumed a rather large door might have been before the wood must have rotted away, Harry's misgivings further increased as he eyed the gloomy darkness warily.

Still, it looked at least dry in there…

After about 10 minutes listening to the hum of the rain and the crash of thunder from behind the thick dark stone walls of the empty arched ceiling and stone room that Harry had taken shelter in not too far from the entrance, Harry was beginning to relax.

This was probably some more ruins he'd stumbled upon, probably belonging to some old dead ruler that people had long forgotten about. Rather boring inside actually…

That's when he heard it.

It started off as a distant whisper, which would have sent Harry running if it weren't for the fact that his feet had stopped obeying him. In fact, of their own accord, they whirled him around and, much to his rising panic walked him deeper into the darkness.

He tried Rushing, but his connection to his magic felt lethargic and fuzzy, like he couldn't properly concentrate.

He ventured further and further into the twisting and turning darkness before him until it seemed as if he were caught, like Geppeto when the whale had swallowed him whole, forever lost in the belly of a great beast (4).

Then sweet beautiful gorgeous light flooded his deprived vision and he seemed to burst out of the mouth of said beast into an ostentatiously furnished round room, and couldn't help wondering what he would find.

Ooo ooo ooo

A/n: 1. Spain, Wikipedia passage, 2. All information about San Sebastien was found in Wikipedia, 3. Kursaal Congress Centre basic info is from their website, the conventions Harry rambles through I am unsure if they have ever hosted, it was mainly to amuse myself, 4. Pinocchio reference.
The Boy and the Butterfly.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter belongs to its creator, mentions of the other fairy tales and stories that the character reads in the fic are the properties of those who created them.

Story Lexicon so far:

Normals: non-magical people and things notioned/made by them.

Rush/Rushing: using magic.

Lifting: levitating/telekinesis of objects

Abnormals: beings or things that is magical.

Sizing/sized: shrinking and enlarging.

Flame, Flaming- creating fire.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry couldn't help but stare at the walls that arched up and all around him, like being trapped in a giant Faberge egg, especially with its many colourful mosaics of various exotic looking creatures, peoples and places, created with what appeared to be precious jewels and metals. They were surprisingly life-like to the point where Harry thought he saw a woman that was standing before a bird by a well swish her skirts in some invisible breeze.

He rubbed his eyes under his glasses, muttering to himself about replacing them.

The rest of the room was carpeted in a strange curly golden substance that reminded him of raw sheep's wool he had seen in his travels, but was softer then angora when he bent down to touch it (1).

At the center of the room sitting on ringed emerald lounges in silver gilt, were a group of people.

These people were arguing heatedly about something. Harry, not understanding their words, was at a lost to what was going on, or what had just happened to him.

It was while Harry was shifting from foot to foot, noting that he had control of his limbs again, but his rush was still feeling to fuzzy, that the talking had stopped and he was now being stared at by the five arguers, or, given how he'd ended up here, five well dressed, obviously well off Abnormals.

One of them, a breath taking women that was petite with perfectly proportioned curves outlined in her grayish green silk toga-like dress that fell to just above her knees and was pale, like lime stone, and had long wavy hair so pale a blond that it looked nearly transparent, like a still image of a waterfall and eyes that were distinctly non-human, a dark all-consuming blackness, and as she blinked, he saw a secondary eyelid briefly cover them and retract- was the first to react to his presence.
She marched over to him, screeching in rage, waving her hands and him, talking at him in a demanding manner, when he shook his head, he was alarmed to find his shirt collar grabbed and yanked upwards until his toes dangled, she began to shout at him, shaking him like a rag doll.

"I don't know what the hell you're saying!" Harry finally hollered back, completely terrified out of his wits.

There was more intelligible babble at his shout, but at least the woman had stopped shaking him, though he wasn't fond of her subsequent follow up of tossing him like a discarded towel across the room and in the general direction of one of the occupied chaise's, only to be deftly caught by a lean sort of person, thin but not emaciated, more sleek, with hair that was currently reflecting the dark boiling clouds outside, where Harry now realized he should have stayed. The new person to have hold of him without his permission was of an androgynous build so it as hard to tell his/her gender. They pulled him towards their face and, without warning, kissed him directly on the mouth.

Harry, being rightly shocked at this, was further surprised when he felt a strange tingling sensation move from his lips, up along either side of his jaw, then his face, then his ears, until the tingle's travels suddenly sharply moved inwards and stabbed him right in the brain. It was like being suddenly trapped in the center of a tornado with millions of crickets that suddenly burst into song.

Fortunately for Harry's skull, it was a brief peck of the lips. When he regained his senses, he found himself leaning against the slightly flat chest of the person who had given him his first kiss panting for air.

"There now, I believe he should be able to understand you Emocionada, really, you can be rather unnecessarily abrasive at times, he's just a child after all," the kisser scolded in what, to Harry's poor brain translated smoothly as English.

The women who had first accosted him huffed, sneering at the kisser.

"He is still a mortal, a male mortal I might add, a male magical mortal who will eventually grow up and make no end of problems for my people now that he has seen me. We are Xana, there kind will always hunt us down, steal our daughters and sisters for their own perverted means, killing our precious Cuélebre, stealing our things…ug! No! I don't know how he found our meeting hall, but he must be eliminated Mari!" (2)(3)(4)

"Now, now, there is no need for violence, after all, he is just a child, and most likely the little mortal got lost in one of your excellent storms Mari, and was drawn to us by the guiding spell that I left behind so you all would know this year's meeting place. We certainly can't kill the boy because of some unfortunate misunderstanding," the third voice that filled Harry's ears chided good-natured. He was old, with a regal, though slightly long face, salt and pepper coarse hair, and…yes, those did look like donkey ears sticking up through the long straight locks and dressed in dark brown robes trimmed in black. Harry took a moment to take THAT in. Fortunately for Harry, he'd seen stranger, (though not attached to anything so close to human looking) so the shock was more statement really, and not for long.

"I have to agree with the Cuélebre lover," scathed a darkly dressed man in a flowing cape of obsidian black with finely detailed black armor encrusted with dark rubies. He was huge, broad, and quite rightly intimidating, "they have a habit of stealing our treasures as well. Treasures both mundane and highly sacred! As lord of the Mouros, I support his extermination to preserve my people's treasures from ending up in a mortal's grubby paws, child or no. They all lose their innocence to their natural greed eventually!" (5)

Emocionada hissed like a tea kettle at the Mouros for the Cuélebre lover comment, but nodded along
with the rest of his words.

Meanwhile an old man in the purple pants with a furry silver belt and nothing else, remained silent as he watched his fellows bicker, occasionally scratching his hairy chest. He looked like an old wrinkled monkey with a thin silver beard, which he stroked idly. He appeared to be listening, but his eyes were very much on the boy in their midst.

"Silence," Purple Pants eventually said in a firm quiet tone that somehow seemed to override the others arguments and they all fell silent.

The room was quiet as the others waited to hear what the old venerable personage would say.

"Chimichangas," he declared finally, with a sage nod, "yes, I think that would go well with lunch."

The four others and their unwelcome mortal guest stared at the old man, who tittered to himself as food began magically appearing on the round golden table before them. The old man hummed appreciatively at the spread twirling his beard mumbling "ah, the cooks remembered the fried bananas as well, excellent!"

The table soon filled with dishes that Harry recognized from his travels such as the Paella, but there was also foreign foods such as sushi, pan fried mackerel, and things so foreign that Harry was rather disturbed in the stomach to see, let alone contemplate as food, one of which the advocate for his execution grudgingly asked for.

"Passed the Gagh Gillamo, might as well have a full stomach before I kill him." the xana grudgingly assented to the postponement for the moment. (7)

"Stop being such a savage Emo, your scaring the mortal," chided Mari, as he/she attempted to coax the boy into eating a little bit of honey fried mango.

Said scared mortal didn't know what to do. But his fear was slowly giving way to a certain hysteria, which caused him to giggle in a desperate sort of way when the donkey man, Gillamo, began regaling to him the story of an ancestor of his who became a monk in the mortal realm and bestowed the gift temporarily to a simple hostler named Pablo and his amusing experience as the steed of an overweight archbishop or the time when a distant cousin of his acquired the rather unfortunate amorous attentions of a female dragon.

By the time that everyone, even Harry (who figured by this point he should try to enjoy his last meal), had eaten their fill, the table was wiped clean and everyone's tempers were slightly assuaged by the midday feast.

"Now, the matter of the mortal," Purple pants finally said, after daintily wiping his mouth with a silver napkin. He settled back into his seat as he thought deeply on the issue.

The others waited with baited breath and full stomachs.

This would be the tie breaker, as two were for killing Harry and two were against killing Harry.

Finally, the old man nodded to himself and began mumbling under his breath.

"Yes, only way really...after all the problem was...but then who would want to...but still?"

"Just spit it out Nuberu! Some of us got an actual civilization of people whose concerns they need to deal with!" the Xana snapped, finally having lost her patience. (10)
She fell silent sullenly though under his stern gaze, before he finally spoke.

"It seems that everyone has no problems with him being a child, am I correct?" he finally asked.

"Of course not, he can't help being a runt," the Moruos Lord snarked.

Harry was not in the mental state to be insulted by the runt comment at the moment.

"Yes well, we can't all be giants when we want to be Lord Mossli, anyway, I believe the matter lies in the concern over the potential harm he may bring when he is older, this is where the division seems to be at a logger head- at a logger head! He heee! Mortals and their amusing sayings! -yes, well, the only thing to be done is remove that potential!"

"Finally the old man makes sense!" Emocionada exclaimed. She stood up and reached towards Harry who happened to still be in the lap of the stormy haired Abnormal sitting across from her, a long thin dagger suddenly melted out of thin air into her hand, "do not worry mortal, I shall make it swift and painless, you are a child after all, so you shall be granted that mercy."

The dagger suddenly ripped itself from her hand by a gust of wind, and landed itself into the wrinkled, hairy hands of the old Abnormal.

"My, my, young people today, how they misinterpret things," the old man chided, catching the dagger and examining it appreciatively, before using the tip to pick his teeth, which Harry noticed, a little hysterically again, reminded him of a baboon's choppers more than a human's "yes, quite a misunderstanding, what I met to say is that while the potential for disaster is there, we can remove it, but not in the rather final end of death you seem to have mistaken my words for my dear, we merely need to ensure that the undesirable qualities never manifest."

"What do you mean Lord Nubero?" asked the now weary Mari.

"Well, by making him one of us of course. He is unlikely to turn against his own best interests after all."

The man smiled at Harry benignly. Harry though was with the rest of them.

Confused.

It took a moment, as the words sank into the adult abnormals around Harry, before they all erupted into another loud argument, reminding Harry strongly of when he first arrived.

"Oh yes!" the old man chortled, cutting across the heated arguments and nodding his head, "though of course such a thing cannot be done, not while he is still so young, and still having so much to do! Oh yes, the wind tells me things…hmmm…yes…I believe we shall wait five years, yes, by then he should be properly old enough for such things."

"No! I will not support this!" the Xana hissed angrily, seeming to get what the old man was driving at, though Harry still felt very much at sea, "I will not subject one of my sisters to…"

"He hee heee!" the old man laughed, unable to help the amusement from bursting forth at the young female's reaction, "you need not worry my dear, your sisters would not be appropriate for this particular youngster given…well, let's just say that your people do not have the…particular assets that would make this arrangement possible…well, it would be possible, but both parties would be vastly miserable in the end."

Emocionada paused in her rant, seeming to settle as she turned a less aggressive and more
contemplative eye on Harry, who was still unsure as to what exactly was going on, or why whatever the man said seemed to suddenly calm the woman down.

"Well then," she finally said, in a surprisingly calm tone, "then I agree it is a viable solution."

"Splendid!" Nubero crowed.

"No, not splendid!" the dark clad lord shot out, standing up, "that just leaves the responsibility of this in the hands of the rest of us, accept for Mari! Just because he is no longer a potential threat to the Xana, doesn't mean he will be any less of a potential thief! What's to stop him from telling the rest of his kind anyway? He is not worthy of any us either way! I will not foist this insane plan on one of my people!"

"Hmmm…yes, youth today, no matter how old, need a better education. You are aware of what he is, are you not my dear underground royal? How exactly is it is he was able to get as far as to this room in the first place? Not to mention finding the castle?"

There was a sudden silence at this then the old man continued.

"His sort, while by no means any better, and in many ways worse than the mundane little humans out there, do have certain ways that can bind them to secrecy nearly as effectively as slitting his throat."

He turned to Harry, face very serious, "child, you are aware by now that you have encroached into a place and within witnessed representatives of beings, some of only a handful at that, who value their existence on remaining secret from mortals at the very least?"

Harry nodded; he may not understand much of what was going on but that was something he got, his life being on the line and all, then added hesitantly, "yes sir."

"The winds have told me that you are not aware exactly of who and what you are, that you are journeying. Your ignorance of your origins will lead you into realms of experiences that others of your sort have rarely seen or experienced, if ever. You will stir things that have long been complacent in their obscurities. You are change, child, this is a destiny you cannot escape, you breath this to me with every breath, with every breeze created from your body as it moves in the world. You are the butterfly who flaps it wings."

Harry received looks of interest from the others now that left him feeling distinctly uncomfortable combined with the man's words. He didn't really understand what he meant, so he stayed silent and merely nodded.

"Yes, you will understand when you're older, as is the way of the young," the old man mused, "now, what we need from you is two things Harry James Potter." Harry stiffened his eyes wide at the sudden knowledge of his name on the lips of a stranger he had never meant.

"The first thing that we need from you is a vow never to reveal what you have seen here today. Now repeat after me: I Harry James Potter,"

"I, Harry James Potter," Harry repeated dutifully, though a little hesitantly.

"Vow on my magic,"

"Vow on my magic"

"To not reveal what I have witnessed this day, except through permission of those who are here
"If they so allow it,"
"To not reveal what I have witnessed this day, except through permission of those who are here should they so allow it,"
"So mote it be."
"So mote it be."

As the last word of the vow left his lips Harry felt an odd sensation in his chest, as though a hot tingling weight had suddenly clamped around his body in a giant's fist, before fading away.

"There we go," Nubero said with a satisfied nod, before he explained the second thing Harry would have to do.

"Five years from now, on the eve of the new year while you are fifteen summers old, five will approach you and each shall take you aside to ask you a question. To those men, when they ask it, no matter what it is, you must say yes, do you understand? If you refuse, you forfeit your life."

Eyes wide, Harry nodded and was made to take a second vow on his magic to that extent.

"Well, now that it's settled, how about some dessert while I explain a little something about each of my colleagues, yes?"

Some grumbling from the others later, everyone was settled back into their seats, a sixth plush green lounge conjured for Harry who sat down gratefully, having felt a little uncomfortable sitting in a perfect strangers lap while the possibility of his own execution was still strong.

He even helped himself to some fried milk, a classic Spanish dessert he hadn't tried that had a firm, cool, milk-pudding center which contrasted with a warm, crunchy encasing of flour and egg, that was dusted with sugar and cinnamon. It was actually rather tasty.

Harry listened, his fear and confusion over everything that had previously transpired giving way, as is the norm for children once reassured that they were no longer in trouble to the distraction of the stories being told, for the first time for Harry, from the mouths of fellow Abnormals that he now realized he had read mentioned in his books.

The old man explained about his people, first of all, a group of simian-like immortal royals, whose origins were so old that even they had forgotten it. They were often referred to as Monkey Men, flying monkeys, or monkey demigods. They were featured prominently in many mortal legends and folklore, such as Nubero in the local legends of Spain he explained:

"According to the mortal Asturian mythology, my name, Nuberu literally means "The Cloud Master" (also known in Western Asturias as Reñubeiru or Xuan Cabritu), and I have been considered the Asturian divinity of clouds and storms, though my peoples gifts lie in wind manipulation and Abacomancy, which is employing a method of reading the future, the present and the past and/or provide help to a problem at hand by using small particles (Sand, Dust, Ash, etc.) as well as omnilingualism which is understanding any form of spoken language. We also have the ability to conjure clouds that are solid enough to fly upon, which is our main means of travel. Sometimes I am represented as a man with a thick beard."

"That's what happens when you don't shave for a few centuries" muttered the Xana into her hot chocolate.

"…who wears goat leathers and a big hat," Nuberu continued with another look in her direction, "In
my youth I was considered to be somewhat cruel with people, damaging fields and pastures, although I was later kind with those who had helped me, I'll admit to having a bit of a temper in my youth. The mundane mortal Folklorists think that I am an Asturian remnant of the ancient god Taranis, who also ruled over the skies and was worshipped in Asturias until the Middle Ages, but that was actually a brother of mine, ah good ol' Yoric, I knew him well"

"My kind has also featured in the stories of the Monkey King, a cousin of mine, Sun Wokong (11), along with a few other myths and legends over the centuries that had stories about monkeys or monkey men. I believe the last sighting of one of us was by some mortal in America in the 1800's, rather unflattering representation, but he was a mortal after all, they often get their stories wrong, or make up things to better explain the unknown," he chortled to himself, stroking his beard, "we still dress up in pointy hats and cackle every family reunion when he shows up, "fly my pretty, fly!"…ah, good times." (12)

"Now the Xana, which is what my dear Emocionada is the current empress of, is an all-female species of water dwellers that is also found in Asturian mythology. Always female, they are a creature of extraordinary beauty believed to live in fountains, rivers, waterfalls or forested regions with pure water. They are usually described as small or slender with long blonde or light brown hair (most often curly), which she tends to with gold or silver combs woven from sun or moonbeams."

The Xana rolled her eyes, while the others snickered at the romanticized depiction.

"As if we would attend all day to our hair, mortal story weavers are idiots!"

"Yes, well," the old man coughed before continuing, "they have been accused by mortals of exchanging other women's children for their own, which is again another fabrication, as Xanas value their offspring to highly for such things, at least in the majority."

"One insane sister, she was put down humanely and her stolen offspring returned to their parents," Emocionada clarified, somewhat resigned by this point to the pointless storytelling (in her opinion, but not willing to promote ignorant human fictions)

"When Xanas used to be a part of the world, mortals equated the Xanas with the promise of treasures, due to their…fondness of cuelibre, a winged serpent breed cousin to the dragons and sea serpents, that have an alliance with both the Xana and the Mouros, guarding both the Xana enclaves and the Mouros treasures. Unfortunately, the mortals are also rather ignorant of the nature of the relationships between the Xana and that Cuelibre, and it was not uncommon for some fool mortals to either slay these guardians in the mistaken notion that they were keeping the Xana imprisoned, or slain to steal the treasures they guard. It is why all three peoples have hidden themselves from mortals and why they are more likely to kill you then spare you," the old man said with a heavy sigh and grave tone, "which leads me to the Morous."

The dark clad Lord sneered, sipping sullenly at a goblet of some dark coloured liquid that smelled strongly of alcohol, muttering under his breath.

"The Morous, as mentioned earlier, are treasure makers and forgers. Our dear Lord Moliss' people are a bit more popular in mortal mythos and have been mentioned as a part of mortal Galician, Asturian and Portuguese mythology, the Mouros are depicted as a race of supernatural beings.

"From my understanding, they once inhabited the lands of Galicia, Asturias and Portugal since the beginning of time. For unknown reasons that are kept only to the Mouros, they were forced to take refuge under the earth; they were usually seen by people in the surroundings of Castros as well as long barrows. The Mouros do not usually go out of their dwellings, except for taking food during the odd shortage, and also in special dates like Midsummer, again rarely and only for their own
mysterious reasons.

"The Mouros sometimes like to appear as giants or warriors, and they include the legend of the moura encantada and the legend of the mourinhos or maruxinhos, a very small elf like people who live under the ground, though it is my understanding that these are a subspecies of the Mourous, considered a cousin class I believe. It will be one of the Mourous that will approach you five years from now."

Said lord of the underground supernatural beings snarled, but still remained more or less quiet, most likely, in Harry's later estimation, plotting away out of it.

"The next on our list is the lovely Mari who is actually an amalgamation of two distinct entities of an elemental nature that later formed the present Mari. The first is the original Mari, which was depicted in mortal Basque mythology, she was considered a goddess—a lamia—of the Basques. Legends connect her to the weather: when she and her then separate half, Maju travelled together hail would fall, her departures from her favorite caves would be accompanied by storms or droughts, and which cave she lived in at different times would determine dry or wet weather. This is partly true as they were both elements of storms and there aimless traversing around the globe would commingle with the natural weather currents of the planet, or the workings of other elemental powers, such as my people.

"The second part of the amalgamation was the god Maju (also known as Sugoi or Surgaar) that was associated with storms and thunder. He is normally imagined as a dragon or serpent by the mortals, and is considered the male half of our presently delightful Mari. Unlike present Mari's female half, there are very few remaining legends about Maju. The basic purpose of his existence is to periodically join with female Mari in the mountains to generate the storms.

"After a time though, they became so lost in their unions, and so desirous to be further and further one with each other, that they got their wish and merged as one being never to separate again. Our present Mari continued with the female portion's name as it appealed aesthetically to him/her. As I stated, her/his' passage in the world creates storms, and is immortal as much as planetary weather is such. Occasionally, they will take to a mortal or another immortal, and things will happen, such as the bestowing of abilities such as Mari did when she/he gave you the ability to understand any language ever spoken, though I believe many mundane and some magical animals were exempt from it?"

The weather god nodded.

"Yes, well, let's finish off with our fine Mr. Gillamio and his people yes?"

The man with the donkey ears looked resigned.

"Unlike some of the others, Gillamio's people tend to prefer hiding in plain sight as it were. This is perhaps due to their ability to change their forms into that of a donkey or mule. They have the ability to communicate while in donkey form and it is rumoured that the Midosians, as they prefer to be called, are descendants of the Greek ruler King Midas who had a rather colourful relationship with the Greek gods and was cursed by one of them with donkey ears (13). It was said that his decedents developed the ability to turn into either full men or women or into full donkeys. The most powerful of them were said to be able to attain a partial state, the desired ears of their ancestor, and those who had the partial state ability were usually one of the first 3 noble traits of the Midosians electing a leader representative.

"Some also have the ability to grant the gift onto others, and are blessed with superhuman endurance. One of these people will also meet you 5 years hence."
'I'll bet,' Harry thought to himself, thinking about the story of Pablo having to carry that overweight archbishop, he reckoned a great deal of endurance and strength was needed for a job like that.

"Now that explanations have been wrought and tales shared along with some rather fine food, I believe it is time that we bid goodbye to our young Mister Potter."

Harry only had enough time to blink before a glittery red power was wafted in his face by Nubero. The last thing he saw was the benign man's face as he idly scratched his head with his tail before things went dark.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry awoke sometime later the next day, tucked into his enlarged bird house shelter.

He would have thought it a dream if it weren't for the bright purple silk pajamas he was now sporting and a sticky note attached to his forehead that said:

*Remember Butterfly, 5 years on the dawn of the day of your birth.*

Chapter End Notes

December 22-25th

Harry had never really celebrated Christmas before.

When he was with the Dursley's he was given a few of his cousin's worse hand-me-downs, or a bit of refuse, like a broken hanger. He would often observe the festivities through the grill from his cupboard, so he was at least generally familiar with how Normals in Britain celebrated.

The first thing that Harry observed as he was traveling through the province of Leon, eventually staying in a small village town called Resto Cuneta near the Tomas river, - Harry had the chance to experience his first Christmas holiday outside of his cupboard.

The beginning of Christmas in Spain appeared with the Spanish National Lottery draw held on December 22nd, the day Harry had wandered into town coincidently. The Lottery is also known as 'El Gordo' or 'the fat one', according to one indulgent old granny in a library Harry was perusing in one village, it was called so because it is the largest national lottery in the world with the total prize fund running into billions and the best odds of winning, which amused Harry, thinking about what his uncle would do if Harry entered the draw himself and won. According to the old granny, the draw takes place throughout the whole morning and the whole nation tunes in to watch the very elaborate drawing of the numbers. The tickets can cost up to 200 euros so many people club together to buy a share, much like granny had done with a knitting group of hers, although there are those who put aside a saving fund, sometimes up to 1000 euros to buy a few tickets for the family (1).
According to Granny's friend, who'd been sitting at the checkout desk, her eyes clued to the television screen, the lottery draw is the moment when Christmas comes to Spain; a symbolic tradition has been going for centuries apparently.

While mildly interesting, Harry, of course, wasn't entering into the lottery, having no money and did fine with lifting what he needed, or selling the odd sketch, or offering to sketch people when he did need it. He got by without being rich, or even fiscally solvent.

During his week in the town Harry had watched from a distance as children streamed excitedly from their school, the break up for the holidays starting, and watched as they helped the adults put up and lights, decorations and trees, which seemed to suddenly appear overnight. Though he had observed that the big traditional Christmas decoration for a Christmas in this country was the 'belén' or nativity scene (2).

Harry's favorite decoration was the large Christmas tree in the center of town where Harry liked to rest hidden in its branches or sitting on a bench nearby to read or writing in his journal or drawing in his sketchbooks while eating a snack.

One of the oddest decorations though, and certainly as amusing for Harry as the rest of the children in town was 'El Cagón' a male figure in a squat position going poo. From what he understood, His presence symbolizes the fertilization of the land for the coming year, and although an important and historical figure in the belén, he has apparently been banned from public nativity scenes in many towns by local governments so as not to cause offense, Harry spied this figure mainly peeking into windows when nobody could see him. Harry added a sketch of the belen and 'el Cagón' to his collection (3).

When Christmas eve rolled around, Harry observed around early evening when friends and family in the town met in the local bars for a drink before returning home. Like most Christmas meals from Harry's experience (having cooked a fair few for the Dursleys himself), the Spanish Christmas dinner involves just as a much preparation, and many courses. In Spain, it is customary for the locals to eat their Christmas dinners on Christmas eve, then attend Midnight Mass or 'La Misa Del Gallo' which meant 'The Mass of the Rooster,' (1) which Harry decided to do, when he watched a group of townspeople heading towards the church, listening in on their conversations from his spot from the roof of a closed clothing store he had been lifting a new pair of pants from.

Much to Harry's disappointment, there was no actual rooster presiding, but it was still lovely service anyway.

Afterwards, Harry joined the throng of merry makers as the people walked through the streets carrying torches, Harry even carried one, having been given one by a red cheeked fellow who winked at him and said "Esta noche es Noche-Buena. Y no Es noche de dormer" which with Harry's new gift to understand nearly any spoken language translated as "Tonight is the good night and it is not meant for sleeping!" which Harry replied with a broken Spanish agreement (the omnilingualism was only one way, he still needed to learn the language to actually speak it back), he chorused and danced with the others as he listened to the playing of guitars, beating on tambourines and drums (1).

Needless to say, Harry had the time of his life, and slept quite deeply the next day in an unused church steeple.

When December 28th rolled around, Harry was treated to witnessing Día de los santos inocentes or 'Day of the Innocent Saints' and from what he could tell, was very like Aprils Fools Day back in Britain. While he wasn't overly fond of April fool's day, given his cousin liked to favor Harry for his harmful fun, Harry couldn't help being entertained as he observed people try to trick each other into believing silly stories and jokes, and was even further amazed when the Newspapers and TV stations...
also ran silly stories. Harry noticed that if someone was tricked, they were called "Inocente, inocente" which means 'innocent, innocent' (1).

It was all the more surreal to Harry as, according to a peppy nun buying tea across from the church where Harry had been window shopping/ planning another heist for his own boxes of tea, December 28th was remembered as the day a bunch of babies were killed on the orders of King Herod when he was trying to kill the baby Jesus, which Harry thought was rather grim, given the good fun (1 and 4).

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry eventually left the friendly little town and was soon in another village passed the Tomas River called Abdundancia, where Harry spent the New Year's eve watching and joining the locals in celebrating. New Year's Eve in Spain is called 'Nochevieja' or 'The Old Night' and Harry learned had a special tradition of eating 12 grapes with the 12 strokes of the clock at Midnight, each grape representing a month of the coming year, so if you eat the twelve grapes, you are said to be lucky in the new year (1), which Harry thought was loads better then kissing someone, blech!

Ooo ooo ooo

On January 6th Harry watched an Epiphany Parade, which even had floats of each of the three kings, or Wiseman (1) enjoying it immensely having never seen holiday floats before.

After the day of the parade, Harry decided that he would fly further south. He cut a sharp right around the Sitema Central mountain range, not too keen on the snow topped peaks he spied from a distance.

He eventually found himself in Toledo.

Ooo ooo ooo

January 9th Just outside Toledo, perched in a tree…

Harry had decided to venture into Toledo primarily because of the local flag, which depicted a double headed bird beast of some sort in its coat of arms, and Harry was curious if there were any still around, hidden from view in some secret place from the Normals. (5)

The chapter that accompanied the illustration in his latest guide book said:

"…Toledo is a municipality located in central Spain, 70 km south of Madrid. It is the capital of the province of Toledo and the autonomous community of Castile–La Mancha. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986 for its extensive cultural and monumental heritage and historical co-existence of Christian, Muslim and Jewish cultures…” (5).

A World Heritage site sounded impressive as well (though not as impressive as the potential for having two headed bird creatures) but still worth a glance either way.

Unfortunately for Harry, he didn't find his two headed bird creature like he had hoped, nor were there any presence of Hidden Places, though the view he had of the skyline of the city as he hovered over the rolling ancient urban spot was beautifully grand with The Alcázar on the left and Cathedral on the right of Harry's hovering form dominating the skyline. Harry made a point to linger long enough to sketch the view before moving on. (5)

Ooo ooo ooo

January 11th
For a change of pace, instead of following rivers, or simply wherever the wind takes him, Harry decided to chart his route on the open road, or above the open road as the case may be, so Harry found himself soaring high above the A-42 after turning off the Passeo Rosa out of Toledo heading steadily further south-ish which soon changed into the CM-42 (6) before he left that busy road onto a nameless turn off then onto a barely visible dirt road and stopped for the rest of the night in what appeared to be an abandoned manor house surrounded by a small forest.

Harry snacked and took a nap, then used the lazy afternoon sunshine and promising temperatures to do his laundry in a small nearby pond and give himself a bath at the same time.

It was as he was tackling his underwear that he happened to finally notice the eyes.

Two large golf ball sized eyes that were attached to a small body with large floppy bat-like ears long curvy nose, and bald head. The creature stood about three feet high and seemed to be wearing towel loin cloth of some kind.

What was more, while he was unsure as to what it was; it looked really, really old with greyish green skin and more wrinkles then a raisin.

Then the creature seemed to creakily explode with happiness.

"Oh joy! Oh joy!" the creature rasped happily, "Old Tigger will now be ables to fulfill his poor old master's wish he wills!"

Harry stared at the awkward shuffle that the creature was doing, which seemed to be a rather arthritic looking celebratory jig.

Harry, remembering his last encounter with Abnormals, was unsure if he should be weary or not.

Harry was also conflicted on the issue of leaving the river as he had decided to wash his underwear along with himself, and there was only waist deep water between him and the old tiny abnormal.

As one can obviously conclude, nothing made you feel more vulnerable than being naked while possibly in danger.

The Creature continued to babble at Harry, seemingly unperturbed by Harry's awkward position.

"They's laughed at poor Tiggers master, Tigger's master was brilliant! Was specials! Was aheads of his time he was! They was nasty Wizzygammy's, yes they wases! Poor master! Called him mads they dids! But master knew that one day, there would be someones who would hear of Tigger's good brave master's work and he's tell Tigger to gives brave good smart someones the orb he did!" (7)

Harry took along moment to mentally translate what the creature was saying, finding that he had no idea what exactly the creature was getting at, except it thought he was some sort of thing called a Wizzy, whatever that was.

Harry was so busy trying to figure out what the creature was saying, that he only barely noticed the bright pink glass orb heading directly for his head to late.

It smashed against his noggin with a rather impressive blow that sent poor Harry into the drink, rather dazed and eyes full of bright pink sparkles.

Tigger, seeing that his aim had been spot on, but unfortunately a little harsh in the reception, quickly summoned the boy out of the pond before the bubbles disappeared, and onto the shore.
Tigger was very pleased. He knew his master would have been delighted that such a young knowledge seeker had sought out his master's old home and coming so far! Tigger could tell it was an English wizard boy, which would have also pleased his master, as his Master had been of half English decent on his father's side.

Tigger considered the large bump on the boy's head, perhaps he should have not thrown it at him? He had not considered head trauma, he had merely been eager to impart his master's legacy.

Oh well. What was done was done, as his master used to say.

Tigger snapped his fingers, drying then clothing the boy, and even magically cleaned, folded and shrank the boy's belongings and repacked them in his pack with a few more finger snaps before the old elf popped back into the decrypted old house where he sank to the foot of an old rotten bed frame, and took his final rest, satisfied in the notion that he had achieve his very last task for his beloved master, as was proper for loyal house elves like Tigger.

Ooo ooo ooo

When Harry awoke, he found himself dry, dressed and his things neatly packed away. He made no time in grabbing his pack and leaping into the air, hang that it was early afternoon, and flew away as quickly as he could, pink sparkles trailing him in his flight for a solid hour.

Ooo ooo ooo

After having experienced another harrowing, and confusing experience, this time not even in a Hidden Place, but some spooky rundown villa in the middle of nowhere, Harry decide to avoid old abandoned places from then on unless he knew for certain they were safe, like tourist traps and national monuments. It seemed scary stories were right on the money otherwise, or at least so far in Harry's experience.

It had taken a solid day before Harry no longer saw things with an odd glowing pink sheen, no matter how he cleaned his glasses (8).

It was in Huelva though that Harry discovered what exactly had been given to him by the creature with the good arm.

He'd been walking along, minding his own business as usual, taking in a tight grimy expanse of old shop windows, when he took a few to many wrong turns and found himself soon lost in maze-like alleys, trying to return to the main thorough fairs.

It was in this alley he was grabbed by a man.

Harry was not entirely ignorant of the dangers that young children could face being on their own, but with Harry's abilities, and his habit of sleeping in trees, building roofs and otherwise traveling by air, he had never been accosted by the sort of despicable individuals that would prey upon a lone child.

"Ah! Such a pretty little boy," the man crooned, pulling at Harry's arm towards his chest. The smell of alcohol was nearly over powering, and there was definite slur to the man's voice, "don't worry little boy, I will treat you good if you treat me, yes?"

Harry, while being understandably frightened was also rather angry and shouted with all his might.

"NO!"

It was as if the word were a trigger.
There was a flash of pink light, and then suddenly, there was no longer a man standing before him, but a rather befuddled looking penguin.

Harry goggled at the sight, already hovering a few feet in a stalled getaway.

The penguin seemed to realize that something was up, as it began to squawk, in what was likely a "what the hell have you done to me?" if one could understand penguin.

Then another man appeared in front of poor Harry and the penguin.

He was slightly portly, with short thick white hair, round rum colored eyes, and dressed in what looked like a colourful pink robe with burgundy pantaloons and a pointed burgundy and pink stripped top hat ringed in radishes.

Harry stared at the figure, flummoxed; also noticing belatedly that the figure was slightly transparent.

"Greetings! If you're hearing this, then you have successfully activated the greatest work I have ever given to the world, my magnum opus! An artificially created ability that can be inherited outside of bloodlines!"

Harry blinked the Penguin squawked again.

"As you have no doubt witnessed, this handsome gift you have been given was a most serious and challenging project that took several decades of my life to accomplish. The ability to turn one's enemies into penguins!"

The man chortled, looking quite pleased.

"Ah yes, penguins! Such admirable creatures! And by turning your enemies into them, it only better the world! I have always enjoyed them since I witnessed them during my forays into Antarctica foraging potion ingredients from blue ice and scales from the Ice Drake reserves…but oh!" the man slapped his forehead, "where are my manners? I am called, or was once known as Rigor Rhubarb, the Questionable, Supreme Mugwamp and that entire sort! I won't go into detail as obviously you have already studied my story extensively and learned of my creation thus seeking me out and receiving the fruits of your regard in this power and vision explaining it all before you! Ho, ho , hooo! I would bet my hat you are excited!"

Harry blinked a bit slowly as he realized that the weird little creature that had thrown that sparkly pink thing at him must have thought he had sought this Rigor Rhubarb out. He nodded slowly, it did make sense.

"…They all called me mad! Called it the most embarrassing curse ever created" the man continued on as Harry tuned back into what was slowly devolving into a rant, "50 years of research! Galleons and galleons of my family moneys! My wife left me, then my second wife, then my third. My five children barely visited me, and when I presented the fruits of my labour, they, along with the rest of the ignorant rabble failed to see my genius and I was jeered out of the Wizengamont and eventually was phased out of my position as Supreme Mugwamp, replaced by that young Dark Lord killer, Stumblesnore or Dumblefloor, whatever his name," he flicked his fingers dismissively, "I knew though that there had to be someone out there who would look upon my work and not think it an embarrassment of magic, that someone would seek me out for the vaunted power!"

The man huffed, and then puffed out his chest, "and if you're watching this, then I was right! Take that!"

"Now, onto the meat of the issue of course, mustn't waist time explaining and all that. As I said
earlier and you discovered, you now have the ability to turn your enemies into penguins! Granted, there are some draw backs, like it doesn't seem to last overly long on Dark Lords or other nearly equal magically powerful dark wizards. Not sure why. It certainly earned me a spot on that Grindewald's kill list after all, I successfully turned him and a gathering of his most powerful officers into penguins for about an hour during a dinner party I managed to sneak into during the war, trying to prove the worth of my findings.

"It's the same for Light Lords as well, so…well, there is that, but it at least gives you a head start until the birds figure out that they can still do magic! I tell you there is nothing more invigorating for the constitution then running from enraged German penguins casting avada kadavra! Ho, ho! Those were the times indeed!

"As for the reversal, I never really got around to it, though I figure that you, my admiring student will enjoy the challenge of it."

Harry, being a 9 year old boy, highly doubted it, but was otherwise rather fascinated with the hints of the culture that Riot was revealing, even if he didn't understand a lot of it. He watched as the character began to fade, only to see it solidify for a moment, smacking his forehead exclaiming.

"Oh, almost forgot! A few things to remember: my magnum opus activates with the first word uttered against an enemy in time of great fear, anger and stress. Don't forget to avoid saying whatever you said in an argument or some such, as my second wife Geraldine discovered, though luckily for her it was during my creation's infancy and she only ended up with webbed feet and a strong craving for smelt.

"The second thing to remember is that my brilliance will forever be preserved within your blood. Should you have any children or they have any children and so on and so forth, the ability to turn people into penguins will be passed down. I estimate it will take about 30 generations before it begins to wain from the direct line without the line marrying back into itself, rather proud of that.

"Side effect to using the gift may include a craving for fish, and among men, a strong desire to take care of babies once they have them.

"Well that's it, my fine fellow or lady, I leave you now, as being of sound mind and body, my last will and testament that was imbued into the first activation of the gift and leave you with this honorable burden, use it well!"

With that, the man faded away, waving happily, and this time stayed gone.

There was a potent silence in the alley way, then Harry's face broke out into a grin and rubbed his hands together happily, "excellent!" and promptly decided to call his newest ability the Happy Feet curse, after a movie from America that he had seen in a movie theater in Madrid not too long ago (9).

Considering what the man now penguin had been inclined to do to Harry, the boy felt no guilt about being the one to turn him into a penguin. Harry was at least magnanimous enough to leave him outside a pet store before opening hours in a cardboard box before deciding to leave the city, figuring he'd had enough of an experience for one place.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: 1. This is actually a real thing in Spain, found it on a website explaining some of
the Christmas activities in Spain, 2. This is also a traditional decoration in Spain, the Belen, 3. Refer to (1), 4. Story from the bible, 5. Actual place and flag, Wikipedia reference, 6. Courtesy of google maps, 7. The horrible grammar/spelling is intentional here, for those who are familiar with HP canon you'll understand why, 8. Rose tinted glasses hah! 9. Self-explanatory really, ignore time-lines of release date.
April second week, Cadiz, Spain, Harry 9yrs old…

Harry had spent another few months exploring Spain, trying to learn the language, which was made easier by Mari's Gift once he was able to figure out how to focus on the slight echo of the actual words he should be hearing without the gift translating it all for him into his brain, much like how he was able to understand how he was talking to snakes when he took a moment to really concentrate while doing it and once that was done, he was able to pick up some of the more popular dialects much more quickly.

By the time the second week of April had come, Harry had decided to move onto another setting.

He decided to visit the Canary Islands before crossing on into Africa, the next major continent on his list, and happened to be closest to the island chain. He had decided on the Canary Islands mainly because he had never visited an island chain before and because the Canary Islands had a flag with a coat of arms that featured what he suspected were wiener dogs, which was rather unique in Harry's opinion. Any place that had wiener dogs on their flag had to be interesting.

This, of course, called for another book, and Harry was lucky enough to find exactly what he was looking for in a small library in Cadiz.

From what he had read in a brief blurb in another book, the Islands had their own original myths and
legends both old and adopted from later colonization from other countries, and while his experiences with some of Spain's myths, legends, and not mentioned; he had still learned, and even gained from those encounters, such as his Omnilingualism, and the Happy Feet curse.

This time around though, Harry wasn't going to simply fly across, remembering his experience crossing the English Channel.

While the weather reports did say it was going to be clear skies, he still didn't completely trust it.

There was also a lot more air traffic then what he was used to, even during the night time, so he decided to try the novel route of actually paying for his way on a ferry boat that offered passage from Cadiz to Madeira, another smaller group of islands, then Isla de Algrandza, the first of the canary Islands he would explore.

Luckily, he'd taken the precaution of saving his rarely needed euros so he had enough for the trip, and the grizzled ferry operator who was managing the fairs merely thought that Harry was one of the numerous children that surrounded a woman directly in front of him.

The trip was long, but Harry didn't mind. He sipped a bottle of water and ate a fish sandwich that he had lifted from an inattentive passenger and settled into a bench and took in the view before taking out his book and opened it to read the chapter about Isla de Algrandza.

"...Algrandza is an island in the Atlantic Ocean, located off the coast of Africa and is in the province of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, Spain. It is the northernmost point in the Canary Islands, and part of the Chinijo Archipelago. The island is part of the municipality of Teguise on Lanzarote..." (1).

So he would be traveling south east then, judging by the position, or at least a meandering south-easterly anyway, he nodded to himself, continuing to read.

"...The Island features a volcano with a crater of about 1.1 km in diameter..." (1).

Harry had never seen a volcano before, though he had read about them, perhaps he would check it out.

"...the island is part of the Chinijo Archipelago Natural Park (Parque Natural del Archipiélago Chinijo). There are no inhabitants on the island..." (1).

Oh, well, he hadn't known that, but it would make it all the easier for him to practice rushing without worry about potential witnesses.

Harry knew his chance to disembark would come when the ferry slowed enough, taking a lazy route around the island for the tourists to get their kicks before moving onto its next stop at one of the actual populated islands.

Harry slipped over the side while everyone was distracted and hovered in a blind spot near the bow of the ship before flitting off when he was sure it was safe to do so, enjoying the salt water spray of the ocean on his face.

Ooo ooo ooo

The volcano, which he viewed from a distance just in case it was still active, was impressive, but after he took his fill he soon grew bored, making only a brief flyby of the only building on the island, a light house that was also some national monument before finding a small cave amongst the scraggly flora to make camp.
He had gathered enough food and water to last him for a while, so he knew that he should be fine in that quarter before he would be forced to move on to more populated pastures, though by then he was sure he would have accomplished what he had set out to do.

He could admit that he had been neglecting exploring his abilities, and knew that he needed to further his development by experimenting with some of the things from the long list that he had been compiling of things he had read about in books and comics to see if they were hidden nods to Abonormals such as him. He also wanted to see if he could fine tune his pre-existing abilities and this setting gave him the perfect safe zone to practice.

He set to work.

Ooo ooo ooo

Algrandza, Day 3…

During his ventures through his home country, Harry came across a book called "The Wizard of Oz" and then got a chance to watch an old 1939 film version that catered to the golden oldies of yesteryear.

One of the powers displayed within the fiction was that of a large full bodied bubble that carried Glinda, good witch of the South (or north if it's the movie).

Harry had discarded it at first as something he could practice with, since he could already fly just fine, but Harry had come across a few comic books while in France and Spain that depicted a hero calling up a force to surround them in a bubble that could actually provide not only a means of travel, but solid protection from weapons, enemies and elements. Harry believed the sheltering qualities would be useful for long crosses without having to go the novel way of travel of actually paying his way when he was weary of the attempt by flight.

He'd spent the next few days finding every reference he could, listing down the possible things he could do with it before he began to trying the practical approach.

Harry found that concentrating on just imagining himself riding in a bubble didn't work. Nor did simply want it to happen and already accepting its existence worked, though it seemed to stir his rush into wanting to do something, so it had to be part of it somehow but seemed unable to form to the demand.

Harry was frustrated, but was determined not to fail.

Ooo ooo ooo

Day 7

It was, like most of his magical discoveries with his rush, too easy by the time he struggled and strained to figure out what he needed to do to achieve a new magical goal.

In trying to master his latest attempt, Harry happened to find, of all things, a hanger and suddenly he had an idea.

When he was six, he remembered his cousin and his friends making huge bubbles with hangers and soapy water one hot summer day.

Remembering that incident, he took the hanger and concentrated, knowing that he wanted to make a bubble and that but doing the actions necessary, he could create one.
Now that his rush seemed to have a direction, Harry felt an odd bubbly (if one excuses the term) sensation that filled the hand holding the hanger.

He gave it an experimental wave and was delighted by the sight of a rainbow translucent bubble appearing out of nothingness before separating from the hanger and floating off lazily towards the sea where it eventually popped when it was hit by a wave.

Harry soon began experimenting with various ring-shaped objects, and found that if he willed it, he could adjust the size and even colour of the bubble. He had gotten so good at this particular aspect of his ability that he created his own sparkly rainbow bubble fireworks one evening for his own amusement.

Ooo ooo ooo

Day 13…

When he felt confident enough to actually create bubbles, he began to experiment in creating solid bubbles.

The density manipulation of the bubbles required a similar mental state as he'd developed with learning sizing, with the determination to "do or do not" Yoda technique (2) from his lifting. He'd had the added challenge though of being able to believe that not only was the bubble's surface density as solid as, say, a rock, he's have the added challenge of warping his thought processes enough to make himself believe that rocks had the same weightlessness as a regular bubble, which took a bit of time.

The hard part came in getting objects that it would hold inside without compromising the bubbles seamless surface. He found that creating a bubble without some sort of ring to act as the bubble wand, didn't work, but after careful consideration and observing how the bubbles formed on the hoop, he realized the space where the air was punched inwards to form the bubble, left an opening by which an object could go though.

He experimented with leaves at first, then fish, using his lifting to hover a jury rigged bubble wand, and then push the object through as the bubble formed. He got particularly good with this part to the point where he could now hold not only a fish, but the water it swam in as well.

When it came to human trial, or rather, self-trial, he reached another stumbling block.

By enlarging the hanger and manipulating the hoop around his body by lifting it over his head and then flying up through the hoop as the bubble was forming, he was able to successfully form his first body bubble. The problem arose in that he found that the bubble was only as useful as the air inside the enclosure lasted.

That wouldn't do.

It took him less time to figure out that he could imagine the surface of the bubble to be hard but also have the capability to generate breathable air during the bubbles formation process, so by the end, Harry's body bubble required a great deal of concentration to form and maintain at first, and he’d had a few mishaps, particularly when he was experimenting with it in the ocean, but he learned and he perfected.

Other than the concentration, the only other drawback was the need for something big enough to act as a bubble wand, but that was hardly a problem for Harry. All in all, he was proud of his accomplishments and took his body bubbles for more and more jaunts just under the surface of the
By this point into his stay, his food supplies were starting to get short, even with the edition of the fish he caught, he knew that it was nearing time to go. As he packed up his camp he thought about some of the other things he had accomplished during his stay:

He had gone on to perfecting his ability to create fire by using some of the applications he had learned with his bubble making, and had learned to create shapes out of the flames, and to concentrate the fire around objects without burning or potentially suffocating them.

He'd also worked on directing his lifting ability on larger and larger boulders into increasingly more intricate aerial dances and felt confident that there might be a day where he could make things the size of buildings dance.

He also practiced his own aerial maneuvers in the skies and, which he thoroughly enjoyed, an often made a game of chasing the local bird life for kicks and a challenge. By the time he had to leave, he caught the birds more or less all the time, having recently figured out how to add speed to the endeavor.

After he packed up camp, Harry enlarged one of his hangers, creating a body bubble, and directed it with his lifting while hovering comfortably in the center, cross-legged towards the ocean, pointing it in the direction of his next stop.

Chapter End Notes

An: 1. All island descriptions and names come from descriptions from Wikipedia titled under individual island names, 2. Star Wars franchise (if you don't know Yoda, and are especially a Westerner, tsk, tsk).
The Boy and the Islands

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Harry Potter belongs to its creator, mentions of the other fairy tales and stories that the character reads in the fic are the properties of those who created them.

Story Lexicon so far:

Normals: non-magical people and things notioned/made by them.

Rush/Rushing: using magic.

Lifting: levitating/telekinesis of objects

Abnormals: beings or things that is magical.

Sizing/sized: shrinking and enlarging.

Flame, Flaming- creating fire.

One Way Omnilingualism: given to him by Mari, he can understand any spoken word, but still has to learn the language to speak back and be understood.

Happy Feet Curse- Given to Harry, it is an artificially created magical inheritance that bestows the ability to turn almost all enemies into penguins, and in most cases permanently.

Bubble making/Body Bubble: conjuring magical bubbles in general and creating bubble-like structures that protect Harry while he travels.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

May 9th, in the Atlantic, in route to Isla Graciosa, Canary Islands.

Harry's first real journey by body bubble was fascinating for Harry. He traveled roughly 50 feet under the surface of the water, bobbing towards the surface every 15 minutes or so to make sure he was going in the right direction.

The sights he witnessed during his underwater jaunt soon made traveling by underwater body bubble style his second favorite means of travel.

The waters were a stunning vibrant blue that took his breath away. It was so clear, like being inside a jewel. There were shoals of silvery blue fish that swan in schools around jagged flattish topped rocky outcroppings, and fish with yellow tails and fins that briefly fled in his passage.

Harry saw sharks that circled his bubble briefly for a heart stopping moment, before seeming to move on to better prey.

He spied what he later learned from a book were Rays, a sea creature that made him think of olive coloured doilies, like the kind that his Aunt Petunia favored for the living room, though with eyes
that stuck up from their flattish bodies and observed his passage as they lounged on rocks and fascinated him when he watched them flow through the water when they moved.

He saw long slender eels that he paused in his travel long enough to see if they could understand snake tongue, only to be disappointed when they swam off regally without a word given or acknowledged.

Harry was delighted when he spotted a large marine turtle going about its endless seeming travel. It had mostly off white colouring with grayish sections on its shell and a slight smattering of brown along the edges, flippers, and spots on its head. The turtle even swam alongside Harry's bubble for a bit, before veering away. Harry felt oddly humbled by the experience.

At one point, Harry even saw fields of strange spiny balls of black that were occasionally being picked off by star fish, beautiful coral, and pale underwater dunes of sand and silt.

By the time night had fallen, and Harry had carefully rose out of the water near the shallows of a beach at his destination, Harry had decided that he would perhaps do more underwater explorations in the future, that had definitely been fun.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry decided to make camp in yet another cave he found third of the way to the top of the island's center most mountain.

Harry found Graciosa to be extremely arid and entirely made up of bushes and dry soil and had a pleasing tempered climate with beautiful sandy volcanic coasts. There was also, he soon discovered, no natural fresh water sources, so he would have to restock his water supplies in one of the two sparsely populated communities on the island. This meant that this visit, he would be concentrating his attentions on the two settlements which he would do the next day, before he moved onto his next stop.

Ooo ooo ooo

Day 2-5, Caleta del Sebo, Garciosa.

Caleta del Sebo was the main settlement or capital on the Island, and probably the smallest capital that Harry had ever visited, as the entire island, according his guidebook, had a populous of between 600-700 locals. The bulk of the people that were on the island appeared to be tourists, and much of the island catered to this (1).

Harry lifted a case of water from a supermarket during the night along with a bit of food stuff here and there, but once his water situation was handled, Harry set out to more thoroughly explore the settlement.

From what he could find, the settlement contained a lyceum (he learned that a lyceum was a type of school), a post office, supermarkets, a port, beaches where many golden tanned or sunburned foreigners were worshiping the almighty tan, the only bank in the island, and a square plaza where bikes could be hired for lazy rides along the coast line (1).

Fishing, much to Harry's delight was also a big deal here as well, and Harry spent a day joining both tourists and locals at the ports or in boat with fishing lines in the water as the island held a fishing contest. Fortunately for Harry, children didn't have to pay an entrance fee with just a fishing limit of six fish of adult average weight.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and Harry even won second place in the children's division with his
rather large snapper and his 2 parrot fish. Bass, bream, and tuna were also common catches during the competition, and when the competitors delivered their fish after the judging to the kiosks filled with grills, Harry was able to enjoy sampling the various seafoods at picnic tables along with the other tourists and locals for free.

It was an excellent end to his day, and Harry, who much as Rhubarb warned, did crave a diet larger in fish, was definitely satisfied by the Canary Islands pallet wise.

Harry spent an extra few days exploring and fishing and earning a bit of cash drawing portraits of tourists before he decided that it was time to go onto the next island.

Ooo ooo ooo

Days 1-6, Lanzarote Island.

The trip to Lanzarote was short enough in distance (being less than a little over a mile across the strait named El Río) so Harry took a short flight in his usual cover of darkness. (2)

Harry settled on cave that was one of many that dotted the raged cliffs of Playa Papagayo, which was also a popular beach area amongst the tourists and locals making it easy for him to appear and disappear as he pleased. Lanzarote is the fourth largest of the islands and has 132 mi of coastline, of which only 6 mi are sand, and only 10 mi are beach, with the bulk decidedly rocky, giving Harry excellent hiding places if he wanted to practice his abilities while being in a populated place.

Its landscape includes the mountain ranges of Famara in the north and Ajaches to the south, which Harry explored either on his own or snuck in with tourist groups. South of the Famara is the El Jable dessert which separates Famara and Montañas del Fuego. Harry had never seen a dessert before and was somewhat awed by the stark bareness, that still was somehow beautiful, despite the harsh landscape.

The highest peak is Peñas del Chache rising to 670 metres, and Harry made it his goal to perch atop it while eating a sandwich, which he did, and even had enough time to sketch the view before he had to dive out of site of a helicopter tour. Lanzarote was born through fiery eruptions and as such had an abundance of amazing solidified lava streams as well as extravagant rock formations, which awed Harry in that they represented to him the sheer power that nature possessed.

He couldn't help collecting a few rocks from those old streams as tokens of the experience. After spending some time exploring nature, Harry also spent time in Aricife, the islands capital. One of the first things that stood out to Harry was the abundance of White.

White square buildings and white cars were pervasive throughout the city, though Harry suspected that it was mainly to combat the heat of the sun when it got hot. Arricife was named after the large amount of reefs that surrounded the nearby beach, and boasted a coat of arms with a bird carrying a fish in its talons.

The population was certainly more prominent then the previous island had visited, and was primarily Spanish though there were was evidence of locals from other European countries such as Britain, Germany, Irish and so on so Harry was not totally lost communication wise if he needed to talk with someone (3).

Harry spent a few days in the city taking the sights, as usual: he got a chance to watch a music video being made, watched a group of people haggle over a camel, and got a cook book to add to his cooking repertoire and taught himself how to make Traditional caldo de papas, an aromatic potato soup with coriander, as well as Legume dishes such as a very popular ropa vieja, and a dish of
chickpeas and meat known as garbanzascompuestas and lentils.

The only real disappointment he had was "Tunnel of Atlantis," the largest underwater volcanic tunnel in the world, and was in fact, not an actual tunnel to Atlantis. Despite that disappointment, it was still fascinating to explore in and of itself anyway so it wasn't a complete loss. There had also been an incident with a camel that had tried to eat Harry's glasses in the desert, and the island gained one penguin to add to its repertoire (which he left with the camel's rather confused owner), but otherwise no hiccups during his vacation. Yes, over all, his first three islands had afforded him both amazing, delicious, and educational experiences and he was looking forward to the next stops in his tour of the Canary Islands.

Chapter End Notes

A/n:1. Information on Graciosa is referenced from Wikipedia, 2. Information on Lanzorote is referenced from Wikipedia, 3. Information on Arricife was taken from both Wikipedia and a travel documentary.
After a few more weeks of exploring the various islands such as La Palma, Gran Canaria, La Gomera, Fuerteventura, and El Hierro, though Harry was never able to spy the infamous ghost island, Harry decided that he would make Tenerife the last before he turned his eyes towards Africa (1). He'd spent his time traveling either by body bubble or by flying between islands so when he left Gran Canaria, he decided to again, fly instead of going underwater.

This time, he flew as high as his lungs could take until the Atlantic spread out under him like a shimmering blue carpet peeking around the fluffy white clouds.

He whooped joyfully, enjoying himself, flipping loop-de-loops, free falling, hard turns and even flying backwards or upside down.

He was having so much fun in fact that he didn't notice the commercial jet liner until it was practically on top of him.

Harry managed to dodge enough to avoid getting creamed by the large sleek airliner, and luckily
didn't get sucked into the engine like some unfortunate bird, but he did get flipped and tossed around willy nilly in the plane's wake (and unknowingly started a rumor about aliens over skies of Tenerife, as one poor co-pilot claimed he spotted).

Understandably, Harry lost control, and began to free fall, though this time not for kicks.

He was saved, though perhaps not in the most dignified of manners.

His rush, responding to Harry's panic, but with no definable direction except to induce the stopping of the current situation flared out from Harry's tumbling body in many invisible feelers until it caught onto something.

Something ancient, something magical, and firm under his magic's touch.

Harry was yanked moments from taking a nose dive into the Atlantic and jerked upward again in a stomach turning ricochet back towards the sky, as if he were attached to a bungee cord only to then slam like a bug in a window into the side of a cloud, adhered to the surface like a tree frog on glass.

He hung there against the side of the surprisingly solid cloud, or, as Harry noticed when he got his wind back and opened his eyes, not a cloud, as the cloud just finished passing by Harry's nose, but a solid invisible wall in the middle of thin air high in the sky.

Almost as if it, whatever it was, was waiting for him to come to that realization, Harry felt as if he were suddenly shot forward from a large sling shot as he slipped inwards through the barrier, so more like being shot by a sling shot through jello, made of light, he added to himself, as his vision of the open blue sky disappeared, only to be swallowed in throbbing ribbons of condensed sunlight.

His speed eventually seemed to succumb to wherever he now found himself in, and he eventually came to a stop.

After that terrifying experience and finding himself yet again in a Hidden Place that could potentially hold some great danger, he had to admit, once his heart rate returned to normal and his poor eyes got used to the light, it was surprisingly peaceful in the light/jello-like world, watching the ribbon sunbeams weave, mingle and dance. He felt he could just float there forever and watch them.

Then Harry saw the man.

As if gaining his attention was enough, Harry felt himself being pulled forward, gently this time, towards the recumbent person until he was within touching distance.

Like Harry, this person seemed to be just floating, though he was in a more horizontal position as if he were resting on an invisible mattress.

He was long-limbed, wide shouldered and muscular with bronzed skin tinged in gold. His face was oval and slightly angular with definable cheek bones and slightly wild hair that held streaks of pale tan, rusty red, slate grey and jewel blue, reminding Harry of the prominent colours of the islands rocks and waters.

The man was also very tall, hitting close to 7 feet or so, and wore a rather simple animal skin loan cloth and a blanket like shawl wrapped around his shoulders. Otherwise he was bare of anything else.

At first, Harry was keen on leaving things were they lay, more interested in trying to escape the place, but every time he turned away to try to do just that, the man would be there in front of him.
Harry sat-floated, legs crossed as he pondered the problem.

What should he do? Should he wake the man up? What if he was grouchy? Harry had a sneaky suspicion that this abnormal most likely had enough power to snuff out his life with an errant flick of his finger.

Still, it was quickly obvious to Harry that he was not going to escape his current predicament without help, and the snoozing Abnormal was the only one around he could ask.

"Well," Harry muttered to himself, "as the saying goes, needs must."

First he tried poking the man in the shoulder, tentatively at first, then harder when that didn't do anything, and promptly regretted that when he nearly broke his finger on solid steel muscle. He grimaced; it was like poking a boulder.

Apparently it was like yelling at one to, as he also tried waking up the man at some point by yelling "Wake up!" as loudly as he could in increasing decibels. He even kicked the man in the shin and bruised his toes for his troubles.

Giving up for the moment, Harry returned to his sitting pose, this time crossing his arms as well and tried to apply his brain to the situation.

There was a man who appeared to be in an enchanted sleep that won't wake up to conventional means. What then did that leave him?

Then it clicked in Harry's mind, as his brain churned over a distinct possibility.

Harry groaned, cheeks scarlet, and sticking out his tongue with all the child indignation he possessed.

What was his conclusion? The only solution that Harry knew of too waking someone up from an enchanted/magical seeming sleep that was a popular cure in a fair amount of fairy tales.

A kiss.

Harry grimaced. He hadn't particularly enjoyed his first kiss ever coming from the storm deity; still, if it was the only way, then he would just suck it up and do it.

"Do or do not, there is no try," Harry recited to himself in a grumble.

He leaned forward until he was practically nose to nose with the man (broken he noticed ideally as if he were in some big fight or something) then scrunching his eyes closed he gave the man a quick peck on the lips then hastily backing away, his face scarlet.

At first, he thought it didn't work, after all, the man wasn't exactly a sleeping princess, and maybe that was why it didn't work? After all the man wasn't moving...

Then an eyebrow twitched, then another. Then the both of them furrowed in a deep line as if confused.

An arm twitched, fingers flexed, coiling and uncoiling as if missing something to grasp, Harry sincerely hoped it wasn't his neck.

A bare chest rose, a deeper breath taken in then relaxed in a puff of air.

Nostrils flared, lips frowned, legs twitched and toes curled and uncurled.
A back arched, and then a torso rose upward into an upright position, legs curling inward then straightening.

Then the eyes snapped open.

It was like looking into the Atlantic from the shallows of the island beaches, or the luminescent bottom of a cave grotto.

The two stared at each other for a beat, before the man reached out one large hand towards Harry.

Harry, thinking this meant no good for him, unable to decipher the odd look in the man's face, Harry felt his rush gather inside him, as Harry raised his hands to protect himself, he wished very strongly to no longer be where he was.

There was a blast of glowing red light that erupted from his palms and Harry was suddenly blasted away, not hearing the man's calls of "Wait!"

He erupted abruptly from the golden world and back into the deep blue of sky still traversing at the speed of rocket.

It took some time for Harry to get his careening trajectory under control. By the time he did, and then finally figured out how to stop, Harry was left panting, hovering over the tree tops of what appeared to be the canopy of some sort of jungle below him.

He grimaced when he noticed that his shoes were nothing more than a few filaments of cloth, attesting to whatever had happened wasn't formed strictly through his hands, and judging by the long stretch of green that disappeared into the horizon both behind and in front of him, he was no longer in the Canary Islands either.

"Well," Harry finally said to himself a little shakily, "that was different."

Harry just hoped that wherever he was he'd get more of a break before something else happened.

Ooo ooo ooo

Meanwhile, back in Harry's previous location...

He had been asleep for a long time.

So long in fact that even his dreams had become old and not worth the adventures they presented him.

He had gone to sleep as many old gods went to sleep as their believers changed in their beliefs, or disappeared, or immortals grew bored or uninterested in the ways of the world and/or refused to change as well.

Sometimes deities will take on other forms, become new gods. Some would aimlessly wander the world of mortals and carve out countless of temporary lives, mimicking mortal existence.

Some gave themselves into new beings, sacrificing themselves on the altar in the name of creation.

He, the great Achaman, defeater of the demon Guayota who kidnapped Magec, and shut it up in the Teide, plunging the world into darkness, he the humans had prayed to and to save their light, and he answered their pleas, saving Magec, and instead locked that Light stealer, that bloody demon Guayota up in the Teide (4).
He was the supreme god…well, the supreme god of his people anyway, when they were still many. There were a lot of creator gods and supreme gods out in the world at the time, but as far as his believers were concerned, he was the eternal god, who had created the land and the water, the fire and the air, and all creatures derived their existence from him.

In the golden days of his reign in the hearts of mortals, Achamán lived in the heights and sometimes descended upon the summits of the mountains, where he would look fondly upon those he created and even answer a prayer when he felt like it. He had enjoyed watching their brief existences and watching the land grow and fall and grow again.

But then belief in him began to fade, until there was no one left to call him into battle, no one to share stories with or to have his stories shared. Even the demon (who made the occasional prison break) grew tired and went to sleep.

He eventually began to lose his power as people lost faith in his existence, and while he was still powerful from a mortals point of view anyway (he was a god after all), he to begin to grow bored of his existence, so eventually, like some of his fellows, he went to sleep, curling within the womb of his hidden sacred palace of sunlight and power, a pocket world of his own creation hidden from any incursion.

Then He had arrived, a boy, a mortal, with hair wilder then the fur of the Tibicena and deep verdant green eyes. (5)

The boy had power. It had erupted with the fiery blast like the heart of Teide, and the force of a volcano's first wrathful awakening from his hands and feet. It had had sent the boy careening faster than a dolphin through calm waters from his world and, he presumed, back into the mortal realm.

It had ruined his favorite vestments and singed his eyebrows, but oh! The feel of the boy's raw power! It had made his skin sing! To think such things were roaming the world of mortals again! Change was here, a change and a call.

He was awake now, and he was no longer interested in sleeping. That there was a being out there, a mortal child no less! Who had the ability to stir a god from his slumber, was a world that would, perhaps, be worth knowing again.

Chapter End Notes

A/n: 1. A reader made mention to me about the ghost island of the Canary islands, a place reputed to have existed by sailors and the like, but never to realized about the tale until after I wrote this chapter, thanks though, you know who you are, and I might consider using it, sort of for a much later chappie I got stewing in my brain, 2. "Needs must"- from a site that explained the origin: "...The phrase is old. In earlier texts it is almost always given in its fuller form - needs must when the devil drives. That is, if the devil is driving you, you have no choice. This dates back to Middle English texts..." apparently it got shaved down in the 20th century. It has been used frequently on the old British show, Black Adder and in Shakespearian work, 3. Yoda, 4. Achman, taken from a passage found in Wikipedia, which derived from an article on Guanches Religion: "...Achamán is the supreme god of the Guanches on the island of Tenerife; he is the father god and creator. The name means literally "the skies", in allusion to the celestial vault (the sky)..."were I got the idea for the Hidden Place that Harry finds him, "...
Achamán, an omnipotent and eternal god, created the land and the water, the fire and the air, and all creatures derived their existence from him. Achamán lived in the heights and sometimes descended upon the summits of the mountains, contemplating his creations. According to legend, Guayota kidnapped Magec (the sun) and shut it up in the Teide..." I believe this is some sort of volcano based cage or hell or both, "...plunging the world into darkness. Humans prayed to Achamán who saved Magec, and instead locked Guayota up in the Teide." He may feature later on in the story, he's an example of Harry's ability to change the world in his journeying that a previous character earlier in the story mentioned, Achman will most likely make an appearance again later, though I haven't decided yet how, 5. Tibicena "...imagined to be demons or genies who had the bodies of great wild dogs with red eyes, covered by long, black fur. They lived in deep caves inside the mountains... Tibicenas attacked livestock and persons, particularly at night. Guanche mythology posited Tibicenas as offspring of Guayota, (the devil or malignant deity)..."-Wikipedia passage.
Chapter 12: The Boy and the Spider.

Harry was relieved when his aimless flying over the vast stretch of hilly, and sometimes mountainous, tree tops gave way to a large cleared area were a peaceful village of locals was going about their business. It didn't take him long to figure out, while sneakily listening in on a small class of students having a geography lesson, that Harry was in Africa, more specifically, 25 miles along a smaller river that fed into the larger river which in turn fed into Lake Volta (1) in the country of Ghana. Harry was understandably surprised that he had ended up so far from his original location. He had not only traversed from the Canary Islands over the Atlantic and into Africa but there were a couple of countries between Ghana and his last location as well!

Harry was uncertain if this was a result of that red light (which he later called Extremity Explosion)
that had propelled him from the Hidden Place of the Sleeping Man, as he had come to mentally call it or perhaps something inherent in the place itself, or both.

Either way, Harry wasn't too bothered after he got over the initial surprise, and decided to continue with his plan to explore Africa since he was already there, and forget his initial plan to explore Tenerife.

Harry understood that the men of the village often took goods for trading or generally visiting other places by using the rivers as the main thorough-fair. Harry figured that when he was ready to leave, he could simply follow the men during the next expedition down the rivers until he hit an area that had a library and/or large market for knowledge and supplies.

Further, since he figured that he was going to be in Africa for a while, it being the world's second most largest continent in the world (1), he thought he would stick around the village to familiarise himself with the local flora, fauna, customs and language.

He'd come to miss his little forested home in Brocéliande, so Harry decided to stick around for about a week or so and leave with the next expedition.

During that time, Harry watched from the trees as the villagers went about their day to day activities.

Some of the things that fascinated him were how the villagers dressed.

While there was certainly a prevalence of recognizable western attire such as khaki slacks, jeans and suits, it was the rich variety of colours fond in the traditional dress of the women and the Kenti cloth and other pieces that caught his eye (2).

Kenti cloth is mostly hand-dyed, hand-woven and hand-sewn with designs that have a story with a proverbial meaning, which gives each cloth its own distinction. The colors, just as vibrant, also had symbolic purposes. Harry was fascinated with a cloth that could hold such complexity and he enjoyed watching it being made by adults sitting at a horizontal treadle loom fingers moving with smooth ease through strips measuring about 4 inches wide as they were sewn together into larger pieces of cloths. As one man moved fluidly through the motions, back and forth, he related to a youngster, which Harry overheard from his position on peeking down from the roof of a clay bricked building, that the Legend has it that Kenti was first made by two Akan friends who went hunting in an Asanteman forest and found a spider making its web. The friends stood and watched the spider for two days then returned home and implemented what they had seen (3).

Harry was also fascinated by the dances.

The whole area would be filled with the sound of djembe drums as well as goje fiddle, koloko lutes, and log xylophones, though mostly drums. One particular dance he had witnessed had a procession of men on their drums with a single man following them with a flute, their tune happy and energetic sounding.

After them a procession of women in their Kenti dresses would proceed in a line behind the men waving their arms from side to side before they all eventually filled the centre of the village and the women would take centre stage so to speak as a lead singer would be echoed by her fellows and they would clap as they sang. At one point during the dance the women would dance in a loose circle, the proceeding and following woman would twirl and bump backsides and so on and so forth. Then they would eventually form a loose horizontal line and one by one go to their knees as the music picked up tempo and their arms swinging back and forth, smiles on their faces, some even laughing. One woman would then dance down the line of other women being joined by the men on their instruments with the women returning to their feet and dancing in a line again while the musicians
stood in a loose group beside them then the women eventually danced around them. Harry later learned that the dance was a form of game for the women and girls in the village. (4)

The main staple foods in the village as in many other areas of southern Ghana, included millet and sorghum as well as yam, maize and beans were also prevalent, and as Harry would latter observe, are used across Ghana. Harry was partial to the yams (really partial, he was beginning to enjoy them almost as much as fish), especially when they were served with fire roasted fish from the river. He also loved watching the Fufu being made, another local dish, as the women would pound with vigor at the yams and plantains with an energy and strength that was rather awe inspiring and applied as they would make dried cassava powder for food like Konkonte (another dish), as well as Fufu. (5, 6, 7)

Ooo ooo ooo

It was Harry's 5th day in the forest outside the village, eating a roasted fish when he met the spider. It started innocent enough.

Harry had wanted to explore deeper into the woods, curious about the various abundant plant and wild life that were in evidence, though he did hover some ways off the ground to avoid some of the more aggressive looking predators.

He'd set up camp later that evening, figuring that a night away from his temporary home base (up a tree about a mile from the village) and marvelling at the exotic sounds that filtered through his ears, when a deep timbered voice suddenly sounded in his ear.

"A little boy, a foreign boy with skin as white as the moon, all alone in the big wide trees, how fortunate for me."

Harry leapt away, practically leaping over his small fire, and landed on the other side in a crouch, body turned to face the encroaching stranger.

Only to stare, in horrified amazement.

There was a spider sitting across the fire.

A really BIG spider.

It looked roughly the size of Mr. 9 Privet Dr.'s Volkswagon Bug. Only this particular bug looked far more threatening.

It was a shadowy grey colour with darker stripes along its large abdomen and had sharp ivory colored pinchers tipped in black and eight large reddish-purple eyes staring at him from its fury bread loaf shaped head.

Now, while Harry had heard that exotic spiders could grow pretty large, he was pretty sure the scientists had not been talking about spiders this big.

A spider that can also apparently talk.

"Now, now," the large spider chided, "where's your manners? I have joined your camp and I sit around your fire in company and you haven't even offered me some of your food?"

Harry, feeling distinctly surreal, felt the manners that his Aunt Petunia hammer into him kick in and he tentatively passed a skewer with a just finished fish on it to the spider who took it daintily with
one of his eight hairy legs.

Harry, unsure of what to do while the creature nibbled (and there was a sight to see!) upon Harry's fish except turn to his second bowl of seasoned yams.

By the time that the both of them were done, the spider demanded.

"That was hardly a worthy meal for such as I little Moonskin."

'Little wonder,' Harry thought dryly, as his fear began to disappear when he realized he wasn't about to be killed, kissed or otherwise possibly maimed, 'The git ate part of my supper, and its portions were for one person, not a person and a great large arachnid.'

"Since I am your guest, it is only right to compensate me with something," the spider continued, "it is only polite after all."

Wary now, Harry frowned. He knew from some stories that when a supernatural being asks some unwary soul for something, it can sometimes lead to extremes such as losing one's soul.

"Um, I don't have much," Harry said slowly, "what is it you…er, wanted?"

"Well, it's a simple request really, I merely want your story."

"Oh," Harry relaxed; all he wanted was his story? Well that wasn't so bad, "Well, that's fine then. I guess my story begins on Privet Dr…"

Harry talked for a long time relating his life at the Dursley's then finding out he was Abnormal, his growth in power, his travels so far and the people, both Abnormal and Normal he had met, and the things he had done and seen until he finished off in the present moment.

"…and then a great spider appears out of nowhere, eats fish, and asks me for my story, uh…the end I suppose."

There was silence for a moment as the spider digested Harry's tale along with said fish ('I'll eat an extra one tomorrow' he promised his tummy) and finally gave a few satisfying clicks with his mandibles.

"That was indeed an excellent tale, you have been leading a very full life so far for one so young."

"Well, glad you liked it," Harry replied, standing up and dusting his knees as he set about breaking down camp. The spider watched him and didn't say anything more until after Harry said.

"Look, it was pleasant company and all, but I got to be heading back…"

"Oh no," the Spider interrupted his awkward good bye, "I'm afraid you have it wrong."

"I do?" Harry asked, with a frown.

"Hmmm…yes, look down if you will," Harry obliged and looked down, and spied for the first time what looked like a large glowing spider web thread that was wrapped around his ankle. Harry tugged on the thread, growing alarmed when it didn't budged.

Harry was then subsequently yanked off his feet and dragged upwards until he was eye to eyes with the grinning spider (again another sight to behold).

"You see dear little Moonskin, a story is never ending really. From the great beginning, and only
until nothingness reigns supreme again, everything is a part of the grand story of existence, an 
anthology if you will. Your personal story is perhaps one of uncountable chapters in that story, and 
that chapter is not over until you cease to exist from the memory of existing thing, even after your life 
ends, and since you agreed to give me your story, you are bound by your word to remain with me 
until it is finished."

The large spider laughed, pleased by his own trickery and the little mortal's struggles to futilely try to 
fly away, "that's the thing about magic you see, which you carry in plenty, a promise by one such as 
yourself, to one such as I, even without the pomp and circumstance of the oaths like what you shae 
with the Skyrider, is as potent a binding as any chain man or god can conceive of."

Harry eventually stopped struggling, letting himself be slung on the large spiders back, and be carried 
off. Struggling was pointless, and when he tried to focus on rushing, he found that his magic seemed 
to not want to be cooperating if he even thought about directing it against the spider. Harry surmised 
that this must be what the spider meant about binding promises.

Harry made a mental note to himself that if he ever got out of his situation he would be careful about 
any promise ever made, even idly, for the rest of his life.

What he needed to do now was think, after all, he had brains right? He may not be a genius, but he 
was reasonably sure that if he applied his brains he could get himself out of this situation.

Then after some thought an idea came to him, a crafty thought.

"You certainly got me good Mr. Spider sir," Harry praised, "I bet someone as grand and smart as 
you could do anything."

"I have had ages to perfect my brilliance," the spider replied, preening, "I have out witted many 
human, magical being, animal deities and spirits, and even the Sky God himself…ah yes, now there 
was a tale…" the spider reminisced fondly (8).

"But surely such a great being as yourself would not want someone as lesser as I. I am just a boy 
after all, a simple boy with simple ideas and simple accomplishments. Compared to you, I am but 
flotsam to your ocean of deeds. My story is not worthy to be your possession," Harry stated with a 
sad tone.

The spider stopped in his tracks as he considered the boy's words.

"It is true that you have not accomplished deeds that are worthy enough for my grandeur, but you are 
still young, and your story will have time to ripen as you age."

"But if I am constantly by your side, great spider sir, and nowhere else, my story would not be very 
interesting for you as nothing much is likely to happen. A good story needs struggles and 
accomplishments, which I can't get for my story if I am constantly by your side, as you obviously 
have no need to worry about struggles, as you are already so perfect in what you set out to do, and 
any accomplishments that would come my way you have already heard and likely become bored by 
it."

"You have a good point Moonskin," the spider conceded. The spider pondered a moment, and then 
gave a satisfied nod. The spider lifted the boy from off his back, and set him on his feet.

"You are right in that you need to experience struggles that cannot be found by simply remaining by 
your side, so I shall send you out to accomplish certain tasks, your struggles to accomplish them will 
ripen your story indeed."
"That is true, great wise spider," Harry simpered, "I wish that I had thought of that," the spider preened again under the adulation, "But...no, it is to presumptuous for one such as I..." Harry's voice trailed off in tantalizing tentativeness.

"I am the great Lord of Stories, I will say if it is presumptuous, finish what you were going to say child," the spider commanded curiously.

"Well, as I said before, and you yourself pointed out earlier, stories require struggles, which you have thoughtfully considered and said you will provide Lord of Stories, but without the possibility of accomplishment, even if I were to fail, wouldn't the story be lessened for only the struggle without possibility of reward?"

The spider agreed, and again pondered the conundrum before he declared magnanimously.

"Then a reward you shall have Moonskin, you have only to name what you want such as riches, fine foods, grand palaces and beautiful women or men, when you get old enough to want such things."

"Freedom," Harry stated clearly, "let it be the ultimate desire of all beings be the reward."

"That is true," the spider conceded grudgingly, he also had been the one to offer the boy anything, he had not stipulated anything but the boy's freedom, still, it wasn't like the boy would succeed, he was quite crafty after all, "Very well. I shall give you a task, a chance to earn your freedom that you must complete. Should you succeed you shall earn your freedom, but should you fail, your story is mine. Do you agree to the terms?"

"Agreed," Harry intoned. Now that Harry knew to look for it, he took notice of the sudden warm weight on his being, as though an invisible blanket had been put on his shoulders, and judging by the twitch of the spider's mandibles he too had felt it.

"What shall be my task great spider sir?" Harry asked, and feeling it couldn't hurt, bowed his head, which mollified the spider somewhat.

"The task will be relatively short," the Spider intoned, his wily mind quickly thinking of something that the boy was not likely to succeed in.

"In three days' time, just as the sun sets, you must stand before me with a wife."

"What?!" Harry squeaked, but noting the smug look, managed to control himself as the spider continued. "I shall even be generous, and take the form of a man and stand upon the outskirts of the village-I am assuming you will be choosing from the village not to far from your original camp?"

Harry nodded.

"Good. Go forth then little boy," emphasizing little boy, "and see if you earn your freedom."

Harry was relieved when he felt his Rush fill him as he quickly took to the sky. The cord that bound him to the spider stretched and followed him, but its unsubstantial nature made it easier for Harry to ignore it, if he didn't look down upon it, and focus on what he had to do. He would have been tempted to fly away and never return if Harry didn't suspect that it would be a breach of their agreement, and he wasn't keen on seeing what would happen, but how was he supposed to get a wife? In 3 days! He was just a kid after all, and while he didn't know much about romance, he somewhat suspected it took adults much longer than that to get to the alter.

The spider meanwhile congratulated himself on a well thought task. There was no way that a mere boy who had not even undergone his ceremony of passage into manhood yet, a foreign boy at that,
would earn himself a wife within a mere 3 days! He wandered off in high spirits whistling a little
tune to himself (and there was again a sight to see!).

Ooo ooo ooo

3 days later…

When the time was up, the spider god was, as he promised standing outside Harry's chosen village
awaiting the arrival of the boy with his bride.

He even took on the form of an old distinguished man as not to seem threatening.

The last of the rays were just minutes from setting when the boy came rushing up towards him
skidding to a halt.

He was about to crow his success at beating the boy with such an impossible task when over a rise
burst a regal matron with good strong arms and full body dressed brilliant blue with gold designs and
a blue and gold head cloth.

She to skid to a halt in front of him.

Seeing the richness of his fine cloths, she bobbed her head in respect when she caught sight of him
before turning her attention back to the boy.

"Here I am great spider sir; I brought you a wife, just as you asked."

The spider stared. The woman was clearly old enough to have already had several children of her
own already, and yet, this boy had managed to woo her and marry her in 3 days?!

"And did she come with you of her own accord?" he asked suspiciously. The boy did have magic of
his own after all.

"Oh yeah," the boy reassured with an easy grin, "she was the one chasing me after all."

The old man's eyes nearly bugged out of his head. The boy's new wife had chased him? What sort of
silver tongued charmer was he?!

Then the woman, who had been quiet up to that point out of respect for the old man and confusion as
to what was being said as the boy was speaking in English and she did not understand English, but
then finally grew impatient and expressed her renewed anger by slapping the boy upside the head
and let fly many insults.

"By the great sky woman! You dare strike your husband!?!" he exclaimed, somewhat shocked at the
woman's disrespectful attitude with her own husband, even if he was a little boy.

"I would never do such a disrespectful thing in my life!" the woman gasped, insulted, "my husband
is a good man and I am a good wife and good woman!"

"But you just struck him!" the old man retorted, pointing at Harry.

"And he deserved it! The little devil!" the woman seethed, her fisted hands slamming to her ample
hips, "this foreigner, probably from a camp down the river, sneaks into my home and takes all my
best pots."

"Your best pots?" the spider disguised as a man echoed, confused.
"Yes!" the woman exclaimed nodding her head in grievance, "He then further increased his offense by putting them on the roof of my house! The little devil then had the audacity to wave at me as if it were all harmless fun and not my best pots! So of course I gave chase! This boy, unlike my husband, deserves to be slapped upside the head! That his mother didn't do it sooner I will never know," she cast a very scathing glare at the boy, before giving the old man a stiff nod and flouncing back to the village proper.

"Are you going to just let your wife treat you like that?" the spider exclaimed, "though I can't really blame her..."

"My wife? She's not my wife," the boy exclaimed with artfully wide eyes, "why would I have a wife? I'm only a little boy!"

"If that woman is not your wife, then who is she?" demanded the spider.

"She's some woman whose pots I stole briefly and put on the roof of her home," the boy answered easily with a shrug.

"Then you have failed in your task!" the spider crowed victoriously, "for you did not bring me a wife by the appointed time!"

"Actually," the boy corrected politely, "I did succeed."

"But she is not your wife!"

"Nope," the boy agreed, "she's definitely not mine, but she is a wife. 5 years married today, with 3 kids too," then the boy gave the spider a disturbingly pleased smile, "the task you set me was to bring a wife before you in 3 days time, and I did! She even did it of her own accord to! After all," the smile stretched further, "you did not say that I had to be married to her, just that I brought you a wife, not my wife."

The spider, the great god of stories and trickery had just been outmaneuvered by a play with his own words!

Then clakkity sounding laughter filled the little glen and the spider banged his old human knees in mirth.

"Well played little Moonskin! Well played" with a flick of his finger, the bit of glowing webbing that surrounded Harry's ankle as a symbol of his binding, dissolved, "you have earned your reward. Your story is yours once again."

Harry let out a whoop and immediately leapt up into the air. He paused, before he flew away though, his gaze thoughtful as he looked down on the old man spider.

"You know," Harry called down, "instead of entrapping unsuspecting folks for their stories, why don't you go out into the world and make your own? There are a lot of stories more interesting than my own out there, I'm sure, all you have to do is write your own within them."

With that, Harry rose up, up into the sky, disappearing into the clouds and off to his camp site for a good long nap.

Ooo ooo ooo

The old man smiled slightly as he turned and went back into the forest, the human form melting away to reveal his more regal form and he mused out loud into the leaves and the wind.
"This is my story which I have related. If it be sweet, or if it be not sweet, take some elsewhere, and let some come back to me." (9)

Chapter End Notes

A/n: 1. Actual geographical locations/information, 2. The dress was derived from mentions on both Wikipedia and travel documentaries of Ghana, 3. Kente Cloth, information derived from documentaries, Wikipedia and a few misc. websites, 4. Actual dance that I watched on a youtube video, the dance is called the Tora Dance, traditionally common to the area from what I understand, 5. The preparation methods were observed on a documentary about local life for villagers in Ghana it really is quite interesting to watch, they are some strong women!, 6. FuFu and Konkonte are actual common dishes to the country. Referenced from Wikipedia and misc. websites, 7. Things like the yams, maize and other items mentioned are agricultural staples of the area, Wikipedia and Documentary references, 8. From African Mythology, any tale with the trickster god Anansi and the Sky God such as how Anansi gained all the stories in the world. You will find a link to this on my profile page, you should check it out, it's quite good, and inspired some of the chapter, 9. A traditional Ashanti way of ending a story.
The Boy and the Flight of the Valkyries

Chapter Notes

AN: Another chap, a bit drabbilish, but containing an element or two that are important for later chaps

Disclaimer: Harry Potter belongs to its creator, mentions of the other fairy tales and stories, movies, music, anime, comics and manga in the fic are the properties of those who created them.

Story Lexicon so far:

Normals: non-magical people and things notioned/made by them.

Rush/Rushing: using magic.

Lifting: levitating/telekinesis of objects

Abnormals: beings or things that is magical.

Sizing/sized: shrinking and enlarging.

Flame, Flaming- creating fire.

One Way Omnilingualism: given to him by Mari, he can understand any spoken word, but still has to learn the language to speak back and be understood.

Happy Feet Curse- Given to Harry, it is an artificially created magical inheritance that bestows the ability to turn almost all enemies into penguins and in most cases permanently.

Bubble making/Body Bubble: conjuring magical bubbles in general and creating bubble-like structures that protect Harry while he travels.

Extremity Explosion: comes out in a moment of high stress, more accidental magic really, rarely used. It was inspired from Iron Man.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a balmy day and Harry was relaxing on the beach.

Well, actually he was conducting an experiment while relaxing on the beach. over the year that he had been flying free, he'd spent numerous occasions on beaches and had observed thousands of people of varying nationalities, sexes, body types, and ages lying on towels or blankets on the sand for hours on end sunbathing.

Harry had observed the strange phenomenon several times and could not understand why people did it. The way some people slathered on various oils and rotated upon occasion to have the sun reach as many sides as possible was something Harry acquainted with slow roasting a boar over an open fire (a trial and error process for Harry that had eventually yielded edible results) and he was pretty
certain that people weren't trying to cook themselves, though some of them gained a good browning or a boiled lobster red.

Harry thought that this was just some strange custom that people did outside of Britain at first, until he realized that some of the sun bathers he was observing were from Britain as well. Perhaps just Privet dr. then, he had concluded.

It wasn't until he overheard someone, an American he thought; refer to the sunbathers as sun worshipers. This lead to Harry believing that there must be some sort of Sun based religion going on, much in the way he had read of some ancient cultures worshiping the sun, like Helios for the Greeks (1).

Harry, having already meant a god or two (or so they claimed anyway, though he wasn't going to really ask and piss them off) had been curious if there was something to this communion with the sun, so while he was passing through Tunisia which was situated on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa and not land locked, he took advantage of a small beach cove out of sight of the more popular tourist and local locations (2).

Harry had set his large towel, a bright turquoise, on the pale silky feeling sand, and pulled out a book and a bottle of suntan lotion that a smiling vendor said was exactly what he would need when he had asked what sun worshippers used best and did a rare moment of paying for it.

Harry removed his cloths and put them in his bag, which he shrunk and put on its chain around his neck (after the incident with the castle and the spider god, and a few others, Harry was keen on not getting caught with his pants down) Harry had then slathered the sun screen all over his body and settled down on his towel, cleaning his hands with a bit of water from his water bottle and settled in to read "Weird World" by V.V Argost (3).

Harry's encounter with spider god would not be the first time that he would encounter other Abnormals during his time in Africa. But, perhaps because of his success with outwitting the spider and proving to himself that he could keep his wits about him, it gave him a greater confidence boost.

He was by no means arrogant in his belief that he could outwit anyone he came across, but now that he had dealt successfully with a potentially dangerous situation without luck and chance getting him out of one dubious situation after another, he didn't want to always be scared off whenever trouble seemed to happen. He would remain smart, he decided, but he wouldn't keep running when he had proved to himself that he was capable.

In the 3 months that he had spent in Africa he had encountered, and survived, several abnormal creatures and beings, that seemed to, quite suddenly, be coming out of the wood work.

Harry soon became bored, sweaty and hot. Not to mention he smelled strongly of mangoes.

After a full hour he hadn't felt any different, except maybe sleepy. His skin was also the same paleness it always was. Perhaps he hadn't cooked long enough? He seriously did not get what people got out of this. Maybe he had to be a believer in the sun or something?

As Harry went about the ritual, he began to reflect on some of the things he had encountered during his time in Africa so far…

Flash Back begins…

In the country of Togo…

From what Harry learned Togo, his next location after the incident with the Great Spider, is a
country in West Africa bordered by Ghana to the west. It extends south to the Gulf of Guinea, where its capital Lomé is located, and where Harry wanted to explore for his next big urban exploration. He thought it would be rather interesting to visit Togo, as, despite being one of Africa's smallest countries, it had the largest religious group with indigenous beliefs, with the Christians and Muslims as the minorities, so he thought that he should be able to gather some significant information on the possible Abnormals in the area (2).

He'd been walking under a particularly thick line of trees when the hairy creature's hooked feet suddenly shot out and wrapped around his neck, trying to pull him upwards and towards a large maw of razor sharp iron looking teeth, with large blood shot eyes glaring at him hungrily (4).

Instead of panicking, Harry gave the creature a good stern case of hot foot as he set them aflame. He'd been promptly dropped and the creature fled, screeching like rusted hinges in a door.

Harry was undisturbed for the rest of his walk, and occasionally, Harry would see the rustle of leaves just ahead of him, and the brief glimpse of an appendage would disappear out of his way.

In the Country of Benin…

Benin had attracted Harry for no particular reason. After his time studying the various religious practices of the Togo people, as well as brushing up on his French and picking up some books on West African Folklore, he'd merely been passing through the country, only peripherally exploring here and there, more focused on reading.

He'd made camp in a bend between a small river and some cotton silk trees for the evening and was reading an interesting book about Witch Doctors, when a small voice caught his attention.

"So, Soooo! A little foreign child enjoying his time all alone making his brain bigger," commented the small brusque voice, practically in front of Harry.

Harry's head shot up and he looked around, not spying anyone until the voice called out "for someone interested in making their brain bigger, they seem to not have the sense to look in the proper direction when being addressed," the voice chortled. Harry looked down and spied perhaps the smallest person he had ever seen.

It was a tiny, 2 inch tall little furry person. Like a Bigfoot, except tiny. The tiny pale tannish furred individual was standing on one leg near Harry's right foot, and smoking a pipe filled with some pale greenish smoke (5).

"So," puff, puff, exhale, "you're different, my oh, yes!"

"Um…” Harry replied intelligently.

"For one thing, you can see me, which is something many young warriors have long since lost the capability to as time passes. Though you are a child, despite what your spirit tells me about your various experiences in the world," puff, puff, exhale, "my kind have no problems with talking to children, still open to belief and all."

"…Alright?" Harry floundered, not really sure how to deal with the creature. He looked somewhat harmless, and kind of like some of the old people he had talked to upon occasion or observed while in his travels who waxed nostalgic about the good ol'days.

Deciding, warily, that he would treat the creature as non-aggressive until shown otherwise, he offered the old tiny furry man a spot of tea.
"That would be excellent young man," the abnormal agreed, and hopped up onto a rock that brought the creature to about chest height to Harry who was sitting nearby as the boy stoked the flame and set a pot onto boil. When the water was ready, he pulled out a small bag, enlarged it, and put some red tea too steep in the pot, finishing with a bit of honey.

Once the tea and yam sandwich (a small square Harry had carefully cut out of a more proper size for a guest) had been served, the two settled into a surprisingly comfortable silence as they enjoyed their repast.

When they were done, the little man gave a surprisingly loud belch of satisfaction, patting his hairy tummy happily.

"That was a rather good meal, despite the simple contents of the fair. Good to see that cooking skills are something you value," the being complemented.

Harry nodded and replied, as he cleaned up the supplies, putting them in a plastic bag to clean up later and setting them aside.

"Despite the fact that my Aunt was the one who instilled the skill in me and the large amount of bad memories tied to it from them, it's one of the few skills I learned from them that I value highly."

"Not big on your relatives I take it" the old man mused, more commenting then asking, "to be expected, from what your spirit says; don't blame you for leaving really."

Harry was curious now, that was the second time the being had mentioned his spirit telling him something.

"Er, of its not too much trouble, can I ask, what do you mean by my spirit?"

The tiny old man puffed on his pipe for a moment then answered.

"I have the power to read the souls of all things that have them boy. The memories, experiences and knowledge that have the greatest impact upon the being, the sorts of things that form the character and building blocks of a being."

"Wow," Harry couldn't help but be impressed.

The old man snorted in amusement, "quite right."

They lapsed into silence for a moment until Harry broke it and asked tentatively.

"Um…what else does my spirit tell you?"

The old man hummed for a time before he replied in a serious tone.

"That is a serious thing to ask child. There are things that can be gleaned from the soul, possibilities that lurk within…hmmm…yes, I would have to agree with the old skyflier that there are some things that it is better for you to remain in the dark about to gain your full potential."

Harry wanted to argue, but he snapped his mouth shut when he suddenly felt a great weight suddenly give him a warning squeeze, as if by a giant invisible hand. He suddenly knew, with a great deal of certainty, that whatever this little old hairy man was, he was very powerful and that the phrase "respect your elders" would suddenly be a wise policy to follow with this abnormal.

"Such a young boy to have the potential you do," the old man mused into his pipe, eyes the colour of
raw cotton glowing from under a fringe of fur, "to be the focal of change, to be the spoke in a wheel of a construction you cannot yet comprehend. You who have attracted the eye of immortal gods, races lost to only vague myths and legends...hmmm...yes, such an interesting things your spirit tells me, but so much more that needs to be built, that needs to come into play to make you all that you are hinting at me now to become," puff, puff, exhale, "I'll give you some advice, since you were polite enough to invite me to join your campfire," he stood up as he talked, dusting off his fur, "continue as you are for a time, explore the world, immerse yourself in it, let the world and the beings that you will come across in your explorations and the people you meet be your teachers, even if you should settle for a time under another's tutelage later in life."

With that, Harry was suddenly left alone as the Abnormal sprung like a grasshopper away in the shadows of the cotton trees.

In the country of Zaire...

Harry was in the densest parts of a jungle in central Zaire sketching some butterflies when something glinted from a bush underneath Harry's tree branch.

Reaching down, Harry hooked it with his sketching pencil and brought it to his eyes.

It was a golden bell on a leather strap.

Harry frowned curiously. He hadn't seen any settlements. The closest village was miles away, deep into the west of his position.

Perhaps it had belonged to someone who had become lost in the jungle?

Harry hopped off the tree branch, sending the beautiful glowing butterflies fluttering away, and stuck his head in the bush that he had found the bell attached to.

Harry reeled back soon after, startled.

There, hidden in the leaves and half buried in mulch, were two skeletons.

One of the skeletons still dressed in remnants of faded black robes appeared to be laying half inside the wide mouth of a skeleton that couldn't have been a Normal, either person or animal. The skeleton was somewhat smaller than the obvious victim, looking bipedal, but the bones of the scull, particularly the mouth suggested something of vicious disturbing-ness.

From what he could tell, the creature had been killed by a dagger that was still lodged in the chest area as the poor sod was being eaten alive.

Harry grimaced, still clutching the bell in his hand. It dinged softly.

Harry didn't linger soon after. He may have become better when dealing with Abnormals, but that didn't mean he was going to stick around and look for trouble unless he had to.

As he flew off, he put the bell around his neck without really thinking about it.

In the country of Bururi...

Harry had been flying for quite a while and was starting to get hungry, so he had decided to make a quick stop and have a quick bit to eat. He spied a nice looking bolder surrounded by tall reeds in a small clearing nearby and decided to settle there for his lunch.
It wasn't until he had folded his legs under him and was about to shoulder his pack off and reach for a granola bar, when the rock he had been sitting on began to move.

Harry yelped as he was sent tumbling to the ground, clutching his bag.

There, looking down at him, from what he thought was a rock, was in act a rather large creature that looked strongly like a rhinoceros with an extremely large single spirally horn on its snout (7).

The creature snorted, glaring at him then reared up on its hind legs.

Harry scrambled to his feet and ran for it, the creature thundering after him with a roar. Harry reached into his pocket, and withdrew a crude ring made from a tied stick, throwing it before him and enlarging it and called forth a bubble focusing only on wanting very much not to be damaged by this creature.

The creature smashed into the bubble, but it held firm, though the creature did not.

Harry screamed behind the protective layers of his body bubble as what he thought was a pissed of rhino was some sort of exploding variety apparently as it blew up in a concussive ball of flame that washed over the surface of the bubble for a few heart stopping moments, before snuffing out.

When the bubble dropped and Harry sat up, there was a small 50 foot radius of chard foliage with the exception of the small round circle of plant, Harry, and one half squashed tree frog under Harry, that had been under the bubble.

Long after Harry was gone, a hunting party from a nearby village found the area, and would remain confused by the oddly shaped devastation for some time to come.

End Flashbacks…

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry sighed as he set his book aside and nuzzled into his folded arms. Maybe a few more minutes…

That's when he heard it.

The feeling of vibrations coming up through his chest from the ground below, which steadily increased with each minute that ticked by caught his attention from his sun baked drowse.

Then Harry was suddenly drenched in a huge wave of salt water as something burst forth from the shallows just feet from his position.

Harry whipped around and stared upward.

There, rising out of the water and coming to a stop at a rough size of a modest apartment complex was a giant statue…of a penguin.

Harry's eyes bugged out as the long sharp beak snapped open and music blared out of the beak that Harry recognized from listening to an orchestra in Milan as Rise of the Valkyries (8).

When the giant stone bird's eyes began to glow an eerie magenta, Harry launched in to the air just as a beam of light struck the spot where he had lain and left a large hole behind that still steamed lightly.

Harry prided himself on being an excellent flier. However, he barely had a minute on the twin beams as they seemed to zero in on something about Harry and with blinding speed and pinpoint accuracy, they finally struck.
Harry was immobilized. He felt as if he had been caught in ridiculously insane drying cement. He couldn't move and he felt lucky to be breathing.

The beam was drawing him further and further towards the large beak, which continue to blare the music even as it victoriously dragged him inside.

Whatever it was, it also seemed to be nullifying his ability to Rush as well.

'Not again,' He mentally groaned, as darkness closed in on him as the beak closed shut upon the world behind him.

With a nearly soundless motion of magical gears, the music now silenced to the outside world with the giant stone penguin's catch of the day firmly within its gullet, the penguin sank smoothly back into the water with nary a ripple to show that anyone had been there in the first place but for a lone beach towel that blew away in a sudden gust of wind.

Chapter End Notes

A/n: Helios, Greek god of the sun, not to be mistaken for Apollo, 2. Actual location information from Wikipedia, 3. V.V Argost is the main antagonist in the t.v show "The Secret Saturdays" and "Weird World" was the name of his fictional t.v show in the series. This was kind of a for the hell of it nod to the series, 4. The creature is "…the hairy Sasabonsam has large blood-shot eyes, long legs, and feet pointing both ways. Its favourite trick is to sit on the high branches of a tree and dangle its legs so as to entangle the unwary hunter."- passage from Bunson, Matthew (1993). The Vampire Encyclopedia. It is from West African folklore of Ghana and Togo regions, 5. Aziza."The Aziza are a type of beneficent supernatural race in West African (specifically, Dahomey) mythology. Living in the forest, they provide good magic for hunters. They are also known to have given practical and spiritual knowledge to people (including knowledge of the use of fire). The Aziza are described as little hairy people and are said to live in anthills and silk-cotton trees"-Aziza, Wikipedia quote, the powers are made up though, 6. Eloko "…referring to a kind of dwarf-like creature that lives in the forests. They are believed to be the spirits of ancestors of the people living there. Legend has it that they haunt the forest because they have some grudge to settle with the living and are generally quite vicious. Biloko live in the densest and darkest part of the rain forest in central Zaïre, jealously and ferociously guarding their treasures: the game and the rare fruits of the forest. Only intrepid hunters are said to enter the deepest forest and survive, because in order to be successful, hunters have to possess strong magic, without which they would never see any game at all…"-Eloko, Wikipedia passage, 7. Erumpet, from Harry Potter cannon, 8. Prelude to Act III of Die Walküre which is commonly called The Ride of the Valkyries is a classical music piece created by Wagner. If you want to get the full effects of that section of the chapter, listen to it and re-read that section again and groan.
Even in later years, Harry would have to admit that being eaten by a giant stone penguin with a magic freezing tractor beam was right up there as one of the more unusual things to happen to him and was harbinger for one of his, as he had come to expect with anything related to penguins and radish wearing people, one of his more unusual adventures.

When the…whatever the stolen penguin was, had stopped the clickety-clank and humming sounds of what Harry would later discover was its decent underneath the surface of both water, sandy bottom, and bedrock, he found that he was once again able to control his limbs, and shot into the air. Though, given his surroundings, he had nowhere much to go.

He was surrounded by the rounded interior belly of the stone beast as it were, and he could see no way out, though he knew that there had to be an opening somewhere by which he was swallowed through earlier.

It took a great deal of hunting around, feeling along the wall, until he discovered what appeared to be a hatch, though not placed in the position he was swallowed through. This hatch was placed at the base of the belly and was just large enough for a single person to walk comfortably through.
Seeing as it was his only possible avenue of escape, he sighed, girded himself and reached out to touch the hatch to feel for some sort of latch to open it. As soon as his hand touched the surprisingly warm metal, he felt a tingle along his skin, and when he hastily removed his hand, he'd left behind a glowing pink handprint.

The handprint brightened for a moment, then sank into the metal and the door opened soundlessly.

"Well, no guts no glory," Harry sighed as he stepped through the door.

He had only a second to take in the softly lit Victorian style foyer, of all things, when a familiar figure appeared in a ball of sparkles.

Given the slightly transparent edge to him as well, this was also appeared to be another projection.

"Ah! My esteemed heir!" none other than Rigor Rhubarb intoned grandly, his radishes swaying happily, "if you are hearing, and seeing me now then you have come across one of my vast network of hidey holes, as my third wife liked to call them. With the magic that you are now imbued with, I left various messages from myself that activate when you have entered one of these facilities, mainly because my magnum opus was created in many of these spots. As my magical heir…did I mention that? You being my magical heir?- You are entitled to these places and all that is in them. It may not be the titles, estates and other boring riff raff that the rest of my fellow purebloods value, but I assure you is just as priceless," he waved his arm grandly," now, as you enter each section or room, the magic I imbued within this projection is given the ability to recognize it and I shall explain the room and contents it holds, now shall we begin?"

Rigor gestured towards an archway gilded in a rim of golden penguins with cherub wings.

Since Harry had no choice if he wanted to eventually find a way out, he adjusted the straps on his trusty pack (rather glad that he had somehow kept it on his person) and ventured forth.

After the rather ostentatious austerity of the foyer, suddenly walking into a giant circular grotto was a rather unexpected discovery.

The grotto was also rather large; looking like it could fit one or two soccer stadiums comfortably within its roughly rounded circumference. The room was lit with an odd greyish-green glow that Harry discovered came from some sort of moss that grew along the walls and ceiling, giving everything a rather eerie glow. There was a plain, sturdy catwalk wide enough to support two people walking abreast that wound around the edges of the softly glowing pond-lake below him.

"The Vault, as I refer to my grandest hidey-hole," Rigor began explaining as Harry began walking the catwalk, "holds the largest crop of gillyweed known to man," he gestured downward.

Sure enough, Harry saw a vast tangle of what looked to be to a bundle of slimy, grey-green rat tails in the water.

"As I am sure you know, it is an extremely rare and hard to cultivate magical plant native to the Mediterranean Sea. When it is eaten, the fortunate individual grows gills and webbing between the fingers and toes, allowing them to process oxygen from water and navigate underwater more easily, rather handy when lost at sea. I used this plant quite extensively in my travels, especially when I studied the beauteous penguin in its natural habitat, with lots of heating charms of course. There is some debate among Herbologists as to the duration of the effects of Gillyweed in fresh water versus salt water, as there is also the individual nature of the consumer's magical core, body size, native decent, metabolism, and health that makes testing a large pool of test subjects difficult, but the effects of gillyweed in fresh water seem to last about an hour. While salt water varies between 1-2hours."
Harry looked with greater interest at the ugly crop that could certainly come in handy. He made a mental note to harvest a few jars to play around with later.

"Gillyweed was first discovered by my ancestor, Elladora Ketteridge, she was the first witch to discover the properties of Gillyweed, although that glory grabber Beaumont Majoribanks was credited with it about a century later," Rigor grimaced in distaste at the mention of the usurper to his family line's ancestor, "despite the fact that she nearly suffocated after eating the plant, only saving herself by sticking her head into a bucket of water, she saw the potential in the plant and despite Majoribanks getting the credit, my family soon outstripped them in quality and supply. This is one of the largest and most potent batches of gillyweed, planted from a cutting from my ancestor's first crop. It adds a good 10 minutes to the initial recorded time underwater, and the waning stage is much more gradual, giving the more idiotic and the absent minded sorts ample warning for when they are reaching their time limit."(2)

Harry finely came across another hatch, and repeating his actions from earlier, stepped through.

Unlike the first two, this room was small, about the size of the Dursley kitchen, and just as tall. Like the others, it was rounded (he sensed a construction theme going on here) but it was also empty but for odd symbols that were strewn all over the place.

"Ah! The Cleaning Room! One of my more useful inventions, if I do say so myself," Rhubarb extolled delightedly, "designed with a 300 year magical warranty, excellent after coming in after handling some messy business or other, keeps the rest of the Vault clean."

Wondering what the man meant by that, he soon found out as all his cloths, his bag, and everything not attached to his body suddenly vanished in a flash of white light. Harry let out a squeak of surprise. (3)

"That handy feature transports all objects and cloths into the next room where they won't be damaged or get in the way of course."

Before Harry could, uselessly of course, demand what the projection meant by that, Harry was suddenly deluged in a wall of suddenly appearing lavender coloured liquid with electric blue wiggly fizzy things that swam about his body.

Harry was too startled to call up his rush, and was tossed around willy nilly, as the odd (though strangely breathable material) began invading areas that Harry never even thought about. It was like being a lone sock tossed into a vigorous washing machine full of tingles.

When the liquid vanished, leaving Harry gasping and shaking from the shock of it all, another set of symbols glowed briefly, before Harry was buffeted from all sides by powerful, and invasive, gusts of warm air.

When it was done, he was lowered to the ground, and he stood there, shaking, as Rigor explained:

"The Cleaning Room was designed with a 3 stage process: the redirection of non-essential objects and cloths, the second stage of a thorough cleansing of the body, everything from Hair to teeth, to skin and all in-between by my patented Clean-All half potion half magical spell imbued into the walls with a self-replicating charm to ensure continual supply- the essence of gillyweed is essential, as it makes sure the bather is able to breath during the process- and the final stage is several drying charms, warming charms and breeze maker charms and vanishing charms that are combined using runes to thoroughly dry and remove any residue from the washing liquid. Yes, this room came close
to being my first magnum opus. The problem was that I was unable to get rid of the side effects. Never could figure out how it removed body hair and the inability to grow more from the nose down. Though my first wife appreciated the side effects I suppose."

Harry let out a squawk of outrage at that. Sure enough, the fine fuzz of barely there arm hair was gone. He had a sneaky suspicion that he wouldn't be expecting any chest hairs when he grew older either.

Still, when he calmed down, he supposed that he at least wouldn't have to worry about shaving. It seemed troublesome anyway. His uncle had always arrived at the kitchen table with shaving nicks and bad smelling after shave. Once he felt that he was not over all bald (he still had his eye lashes, eyebrows and wild black hair) he soon overcame his outrage and shock and quickly made his way to the next room, a small bathroom sized area with empty closet rods that Harry suspected were once used for cloths and where one changed and collected their things after that little clean up. Harry dressed quickly.

The next hatch opened up into an even more daunting sight.

It was like walking into a large stone honey comb/maze.

There were doors of varying sizes, shapes and colors and not just hatches this time. Small windows that Harry would discover later that only allowed one to see from inside their various rooms, all positioned in unusual places such as the floor and the ceiling as well as the walls.

"This is the Nexus, the central point by which one can access all the rooms of the Vault," Rhubarb explained giddily, "several pocket dimensions, and undetectable extension charms make it a bit of a tricky number to navigate, so I installed a rather useful spell to provide my heir, should you ever find this place, that I call the Touring Spell, after all it is only polite to show someone around, and this way you get to see everything and you won't get lost, though it is a onetime only spell and will wear off after the tour is over, though methods of finding your way around will be explained at the end of the tour, enjoy!"

There was a sudden jerk on Harry's shirt, as if he were grabbed and tugged forward at a rapid pace by a large invisible hand (4).

"Try not to use any magic while the spell is active, a test crup lost its skin that way, poor thing, never did work out the kinks," Harry may not know what a Crup was but he was the type to appreciate warnings that literally saved his skin, stopped fighting the spell and allowed it to tug him forwards towards the first door, resigned.

Ooo ooo ooo

The first room on his tour was, in fact, a wide open field. It was the same size as the grotto, and slightly hilly with fruit trees that grew intermittently, and yellow green grass that waved lazily in the artificial wind.

"This is one of the various habitats that I have in the Vault," Rhubarb explained, "I have always had an interest animal both magical and otherwise, and was one of my Masteries that I achieved over the years," he pointed to a large flock of what looked like ostriches, though with a reddish plumage instead of the customary black. They were lazily feeding from the trees or brooding over nests as Harry watched them as he flew overhead (the spells doing not his own).

"These are the FireWing ostriches of South Africa. My grandfather, Urglise the Singed, was the only successful breeder of them before the species was nearly wiped out by overzealous wizards who
over hunted them for the value of their plumage, blood and body parts in various highly rare potions and rituals. My grandfather's flock was the last of them, so after he died I moved the remaining birds to the Vault. They are rather simple creatures to rear really, the key is to feed them yellow plums and keep a steady supply of the trees on hand. A happy Firewing ostrich is an unsigned wizard, as my grandfather used to say." (5)

Sure enough, the last thing Harry spotted was an ostrich shooting a ball of fire from under its wing at a pile of yellow fruit for a group of keenly watching and hungry chicks, before he was whisked away through a hatch imbedded in the artificial skyline.

Ooo ooo ooo

The next room was a collection of cubicles that held tiny beds and other small furniture that were obviously vacant.

"After I was shamed by the fools in the Ministry," Rhubarb explained, less jovially, "my eldest son seized control of the bulk of the family assets, with the exception of the Vault and a few other places that held my labs and academic outposts, and along with becoming the new Rhubarb lord, he took possession of all the house elves that I had working here. I was left only old Tiggy, the good loyal House elf that you have already met."

So that was what the name of the creature was that beaned him with that orb and nearly drowned him.

"These were the house elf quarters. At one time, the elves served up to 300 here, more than Hogwarts, though it is my understanding that my son gave many of them to Hogwarts to serve the school as he didn't need them, unable to enter the Vault without the key," here he winked at Harry, "which is why much of the Vault remains undisturbed by my unlearned offspring, though preserved and attended by a rather complex set of enchantments to ensure everything is clean and running smoothly."

Fortunately the Touring spell was quick in this rather sad looking place and he was quickly dragged off to another room.

Ooo ooo ooo

The next room Harry entered was not as large as the Firewing ostrich habitat, but it was vastly tall. Harry was just surprised that it didn't reach the surface, and suspected that it was possibly a combination of how deep Harry was and the magics that Rhubarb had mentioned earlier that influenced space.

It was a tall room with deep magenta coloured walls, absolutely covered in mirrors.

"The Mirror Room! A rather delightful collection that I acquired from my Aunt, Berta Yarklark, on my mother's side who was a lovely woman, believed herself to be the descendant of Narcissus from Greece, poor chap, and had a rather interesting mirror collecting fetish, magical or otherwise. I inherited the collection after she committed suicide, poor thing, not wanting to face the horrors of seven years bad luck after she broke one of her mirrors."

Harry was lead around the tall ringed wall of mirrors. Some mirrors were so horribly gaudy that they made his eyes hurt while Rigor happily pointed to this mirror and that, shooting off random histories that boggled Harry's mind, such as:

"Ah! There is the mirror that once belonged to Hegar the Horrendous who was a rather inept
overweight Viking that liked to keep his helm as shiny as possible to induce blindness in his enemies..." (6).

"Oh! And there is the wall mirror that belonged to an unfortunate girl that was locked away into a tower by her crazed mother. Her hair was said to be nearly indestructible and gave eternal youth those who brushed it..."(7).

"Now there is a handsome mirror, caused no end of trouble with the Ministry in its infancy when a witch used it to spy on people and kill all those who the mirror showed her to be more beautiful then she..." (8).

"...And, yes, I do believe that is the mirror said to contain the malicious poltergeist of a woman who was brutally murdered and has a habit of haunting then killing its owners. This mirror was last recent edition of her collection, took a while to exercise the spirit..."(9).

And so on and so on it went down the line until Harry's head was so full of mirror related stories (and confirmations on a few that he had already read about in his studies and now had confirmed as being partially true) that by the time the tour was over he had a bit of a headache, even if it was rather fascinating.

Ooo ooo ooo

There was a room he was dragged into that held enough paintings and statues fill at least five art galleries and a few museums. Some of the pieces Harry was told by the Rhubarb projection were hundreds to thousands of years old. Some of them even moved! One picture of an old woman pouring herself a cup of wine even winked at him and told him that she was free anytime he wanted a little "fun." Harry hastily sidled away as soon as politeness allowed.

There was a smaller room right beside that one that held an art studio. Here Harry spent a great deal of time, what was allowed to him from the spell, experimenting with both mundane, and definitely not normal paints of the magic variety (one tube of grass green told him primly that it was not to be mixed with crimson red unless he was going for the effect of mud on his canvas).

Rhubarb told him that he had tried taking up painting, but found that fine arts were not his forte, and Harry was treated to the projection's sulking countenance until he moved onto the next room.

Ooo ooo ooo

The next room thankfully turned out to be a huge kitchen. The spell actually gave him a 2 hour's break here, he was informed, to use the facilities (there was a small working bathroom off to the side) and have a little something to eat and a bit of a rest.

Fortunately, while the kitchen was bare, he did have food on him, so he made a quick repast of fruit and dried fish with a bottle of water. By the time that he was caught up in the spell again, he was much more relaxed and clear headed.

Ooo ooo ooo

Room after room he sailed through for days.

He would get breaks every so often, an hour here, 30 minutes there. Fortunately the touring spell also gave him time to sleep, about 8 hours each day, though only when he came across one of the numerous spare bedrooms, offices, or recreation rooms.

He saw things that he never would have imagined, such as that one room that was made entirely out
of preserved pineapple jello. Apparently it was abnormals that introduced the concept of the popular concoction to the normals, that he learned were called muggles, and Rigor's lot were called wizards and witches.

He saw more habitats, a fair few of them containing various species of Penguins, these frigid places Harry made sure to have his warmest coat on hand. They were fortunately quick.

There were other habitats, such as fields containing strange bird-horse hybrids that Riot explained were called Hippogriffs, Harry learned the benefits of bowing that day, and was allowed to spend a bit of time getting to know the herd (since they were his now, and there was a mind boggling thought!), they were rather nice an impressive once Harry showed the proper respect.

There were habitats that held fiery pits that contained sizzling salamanders and hissing Ashwinders, giant cave like forested places with giant spiders that the projection called Arcumantulas, making Harry wonder if they were distantly related to the one he met in Africa.

Harry ended up in rooms that held vast swaths of richly colored cloths, and was not allowed to leave by the spell until he had chosen a robe, or a pair of boots or a hat. By the time he was through with them he had a full set of wizarding attire that he was assured was both comfortable and fashionable. Rigor's reasoning was that no magical heir of his should be without fine cloths to proclaim his station in life, etc.

Harry shrunk them and stowed them away. He supposed if he ever came across one of these wizarding communities that Rigor alluded to, which probably was highly likely since he often referred to a "Wizading World" on more than one occasion, he could at least blend in. Harry had read about witches and wizards of course, they were teeming throughout literature.

During his adventure in the land of rooms as he came to mentally refer to it, he had come to wonder if perhaps maybe he was a wizard?

It could be possible, after all, they were magical humans, and he supposed he was a magical human. But the way that the man talked about things, or some of the things he was shown, such as the Room of Wands which held the Rhubarb family wands (self-updating) and droned on about how the wand makes the wizard, (or any wand varnished with the juice of the family namesake) he also talked about this spell, and that spell and potions ingredients when they were in what Riot bragged was the largest storehouse of potions and potions ingredients known to wizardom.

All these methods of how wizards used their magic, methods he recognized from some fictions even, but all methods that Harry never applied to rushing. Harry eventually came to the conclusion that wizards were possibly some form of magical human, and He himself was human enough looking that he might be one, at least, was somewhat sure he was human, since normals were humans and his mother was related to normals (unless she was adopted? Hmmm… now there was a pleasant thought) still, whatever he was, even if the possiblitly was high that he was a wizard, the way that he rushed and the way that he was so ming to understand how these wizards worked their magic appeared to be vastly different, as he didn't use things like potions or wands or spells to work his magic. He was at least confident enough he could pass as off as one in a crunch if he ever venture into their territories which he assumed from Rigor's talk, existed and were extensive. He even wondered if some of those hidden places that he had seen during his trouble might have been them.

Well, it was a question for another day he supposed.

Ooo ooo ooo

By the time that a week nearly passed, Harry was sure he must have been in the largest enclosed
He was beginning to despair of ever being able to fly in the sky again, lost forever in a mad (though brilliant) wizard's place, lost forever like the man's third wife's favorite parakeet Bagel who had never been recovered, only for its tiny bird bones to be found in the skeleton of some large lizard in the Nexus outside of a room that contained a town made from, and peopled by, candy by Harry some years later (10).

It was while he was taking a break in a room with a large glass orb filled with miniaturized tornado's that he was informed suddenly by Rigor that he had only one more room to go before he would return to the Gillyweed field where he would be free of the spell, and an exit would appear, relieving Harry greatly.

"The Artifact Room!" crowed the man, as he gestured to a room that was more like an area found in a museum were several shelves and pedestals sat in neat rows that held a wide variety of odd objects, "nowhere will you find a greater collection of rare magical items! Each perfectly preserved under a magically constructed bell glass to ensure that the more temperamental artifacts won't take issue with their neighbors or adversely affect the observer, …rather temperamental, a few of them!" the man chortled, as Harry strolled slowly deeper into the place.

Harry, of course, had little to no understanding or experience with Rhubarb's people or his world, but he had a sneaky suspicion as to why most of these things were so rare, examples of the numerous inventories included:

Consi gohedge slippers- has the ability to make people run at superspeed. (11)

These sounded useful to Harry, though the fact that they were large, bright blue, and fuzzy gave him pause, but he figured it couldn't hurt to have around, so he removed the slippers (Rhubarb informed him helpfully that as the man's magical heir, whatever that met, he had the ability to help himself to anything Harry wanted from the vast collections found in his secret lair)- he then shrunk the slippers and placed them in a Ziploc bag.

Toh Teef Maracas- has the ability to make opponents dance the flamingo while maracas are being shaken. (12)

That had the possibility to be highly entertaining, not to mention useful for quick getaways, even if it was rather odd. So, promising to test them out later on an unsuspecting group of drunks, he also pocketed them.

Cat's Cradle Gloves- has the ability to weave any substance in to form of choice.

This was much more practical, and would certainly eliminate the necessity of stealing cloths later, it bore testing. He pocketed them.

Bugdar band- gives wearer the ability to grow ant antennae.

Harry blinked at that. Not knowing what he could find useful about them, he left it be.

Sasvero tea kettle- has the ability to make any one who drinks from it have vertigo for one hour.

Again, not exactly useful to Harry, though the pattern was a lovely rainbow-ish glaze combined with a dark ceramic.

The Nokmey Brand- a brand with a combination of Chinese words and number contained in the centre of an alchemistic symbol surrounded inside the alchemistic symbol by 3 runes and three
singular symbols surrounding them. When the brand is placed on the base of the spine, where the tailbone begins, it will magically brand the symbol into the flesh permanently. On the next rising of the sun, the wearer will have grown a prehensile of a monkey's tail.

Warning: this is a permanent alteration that cannot be removed magically or mundanely.

Second warning: It only works for the magically able. (13)

Harry had to admit, he was very interested in this. What little boy or girl wouldn't be tempted? And better yet, he actually had an excuse, since he often sat in trees…still, who knew what sorts of trouble having a tail may cause? He bit his lip, his fascination warring with his pragmatism. He eventually just decided to take it with him anyway, and figure it out later.

Gourd of the Roar- a gourd that when uncorked releases a roar that has the ability to cause an earthquake within a half mile radius.

Harry was not looking to level buildings, so he passed that one quick enough, though he had to admit to being a bit curious about it.

The Reverse Ostrich shovel- when the blade of the shovel is forcefully stabbed into the ground, it causes the earth to open up directly under opponent for 30 seconds and bury him up to his chin.

Not really useful as he wasn't looking to bury anyone, so pass.

Omega bracelet- when worn it allows the wearer to be immune to electrical based attacks, spells, or natural or manmade electricity.

Oh yeah! This one was definitely on Harry's take list! For a boy who flew at possible lightning strike height and lived outdoors in general a fair bit, he could see definite uses for that. He slipped the bracelet on, a silver piece meant to look like entwined lightning bolts, yet delicate enough to not be ostentatious and actually fitted itself to his wrist!

Gemini needle- when a user pricks their finger with the Gemini needle, it creates a double from 3 drops of the user's blood. The user can use their double to do certain activities that the original don't have time to, and when the user touches their double, it dissipates the double and the memories from it will be absorbed into the user's mind.

Warning: the effect will only last for 24 hours, if you do not touch your double before time limit is up, the information they held is lost. Further, the double will not have the ability to use magic, as magical cores cannot be duplicated.

This would be useful for studying. He would be able to have his double study or hunt or explore while he did something else. It was worth the blood spilt, provided it never became too much. He added that to his supplies, though he did wonder what a "magical core" was.

Bullseye Monocle- gives the wearer 1 minute of perfect aim.

He supposed it could be useful for hunting, but one minute wasn't very long, unless he timed it. Seemed more hassle then it was worth unless he decided to assassinate someone or something, so he left it be.

The Tartar Nose Ring- gives the wearer the ability to never smile while wearing it

Warning: wearer will look perpetually sour or grumpy in appearance. (14)
Harry chuckled, shaking his head. He was perfectly fine with his facial expressions. He left it under glass and moved on.

The Perrier Cup- this 250ml cup has the ability to continuously refill with any liquid that was poured into it beforehand (be sure to say out loud what it is to log in the drink).

Warning: for unknown reason, it does not work on Worcester sauce. Avoid adding this and anything with the sauce as an ingredient, such as Himmel's anti-choke lozenges (for a full list see below). It causes the cup terrible indigestion and wont replicate.

Another highly useful tool! Harry wouldn't have to constantly find water sources to refill his supplies when they became low! So he took the cup.

Gum- a muggle origin device that simulates chewing candy, but for some reason are not able to swallow. If swallowed, it retains its consistency, remaining undigested.

Warning: chew to long and the flavour disappears and it is hard to get off the bottom of footwear and in hair as it is also resistant to vanishing charms and cleaning charms.

Harry just raised his brow. He suddenly wondered how often Rhubarb got out into the world of Normals to think that Gum (Bubba Nubba cherry in this case), was something magical. He moved on, still shaking his head.

Portkyn Patch- this eye patch gives the wearer the ability to see through walls with whatever eye is covered.

Oooo! Another useful trinket! Yoink! And into the bag it went!

Sloth Net- induces a deep lethargic effect in those who have been covered by the net.

Warning: if used on enemies, make sure the entire body is covered, as it only works on the bits covered by the net.

Might be useful again for hunting but with his abilities, but it wasn't really necessary for him.

The Marx Mats- a set of five placemats that induce witty and entertaining conversations at dinner tables for up to five people.(15)

Warning: do not use a mat singly as it induces talking to oneself once out in public.

Another pass, Harry didn't have dinner parties.

Chaplin Suspenders- gives the wearer the ability to conform one's body to whatever space, no matter how small or awkward.

Warning: don't wear on the Knight Bus, as it induces a cancelation effect on both elements until they are separated. (16)

Harry was not sure what the Knight Bus was, but he figured he wasn't likely to run across it, so he added the suspenders to his outfit. he felt slightly tingly at first but that soon dissipated and he shrugged it off.

The Nogad Earrings- induces disinterest in all those who happen to look at the wearer of the earrings until they are removed.

Warning: you must wear both to obtain effect. Does not work on unicorns, snakes, and Doxies.
Useful, definitely, thief that he was at times, and the constant danger that he was in, and the many windows he peeped through on the sly made this a useful item. So in they went to his bag.

_Tibbles Toothpick- this item repels all species of birds within a 3 mile radius when held between the teeth of user. Once removed, birds return._

Warning: may attract housecats.(17)

Harry liked birds, so he passed on that.

_Fiddler's Filaede' Violin- gives the player the ability to control all feline type species, or a mild compulsion in part felines while being played._

Warning: it must be an actual melody. Any player that does not know how to competently play will induce all feline species, including part felines, to attack the player.

Again, another pass. He liked cats, but he was not a violin player, and wasn't keen to trust his luck.

So and so on down the line. He gathered a few more things and steered clear as much as he was able to of others such as _Mutter Mimble's Face Beard_, able to control the minds of unfortunate wearers, and spawn when others pet it (18). He finally reached the end of the tour when he felt the tug that had been constant all week disappear from his person as he stood before a final hatch.

On the other side he was relieved to find the familiar eeriness of the Gillyweed field.

"Alas! It seems my lovely tour has come to an end!" Rigor exclaimed, taking off his hat and grandly bowing, "you will find that the exit is a silvered circled just to your left. The magic of the transporter rings will read your intent to leave and deposit you back in the last location that you were in before your invitation."

'Invitation my arse!' Harry thought sourly.

"Just stand in the rings and say "Exit!" and it shall handle the rest."

Harry spotted the rings a little to the right. Before he did though, he took out a large head sized jar that he acquired from the Jar Room (best unbreakable preservable jars! One of my cousin Mabel's creations) and lifted a large wad of the gillyweed (looking even more…interesting) out of the water, and hovered it into the jar, snapping the lid closed and shrinking and putting it in his bag then stepped into the centre of the ring. Before it activated, Rigor gave him his last messege.

"To return to the Vault, merely say "Vault Hooo!" while wearing this ring," a simple grey band of metal with the silhouette of a penguin appeared magically on his left pointer finger, "this will bring you to the reception room and it will also guide you to any room that you need to find, good luck and safe journeys my heir." With a final bow the projection disappeared in a shimmer of pink sparks.

The the large blue ring engraved on the floor hummed to life with a bluish glow and Harry said clearly "Exit!"

He was suddenly surrounding by six large metal-like rings that pulsed a blue light and then when they lowered back into the ground, disappearing as they went, he realized he was standing on the beach he had been…invited from (19). The section of the beach must have been rather unpopular as Harry managed to find his towel and book where he had left them a week ago, though they were partially buried under the sand. He dallied only long enough to give his things a brisk shake, shrank them, then lifted into the air and gave a glad cry as he embraced the sky with relief.
An: info taken from Harry Potter Wiki, 2. The people mentioned are actually from the canon-verse and also taken from Harry Potter Wiki with both 1 and 2 having a few slight alterations for the sake of the story, 3. Flash of light when HP's cloths are taken was inspired by the transporter from "Stargate: SG1" television show belonging to the Asgards, 4. Spell was inspired by the magical summoning methods employed by the witch in "Spirited Away" on the main character, 5. From "The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures" according to a South African Bushmen myth, the Ostrich originally possessed the gift of fire and kept it hidden under his wing, 6. Character inspired by the comic strip "Hagar the Horrible", 7. Inspired by the movie "Tangled", 8. "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" fairy tale reference, 9. Inspired from an episode from the show "Supernatural", 10. Candy town inspired by the show "Imagination Land", 11. Word scramble of Sonic Hedgehog inspired by the "Sonic the Hedgehog" franchise, 12. Word scramble of Hot Foot and inspired by the story of the "The Red Shoes.", 13. Word Scramble: Monkey, 14. Take a guess! :D, 15. Inspired by the Marx brothers and the movie "Duck Soup.", 16. Inspired by Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times" movie, 17. Inspired by the true story of a cat named Tibbles that wiped out an endangered species of bird, 18. Inspired by a Cyanide and Happiness cartoon short on youtube, 19. Inspired by the transport rings from Stargate franchise.
October 14th – October 16th, the Island of Pantelleria, part of Italy...

Harry was currently on the Island of Pantelleria, an Italian island in the Strait of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea, 100 km southwest of Sicily (1), were Harry would be traveling next, and a day or two after he was released from The Vault.

Harry smiled as he took in a deep breath of fresh air.

He had decided to make camp and instead of concentrating on stories, his language studies and practicing his rushing, or even experimenting with the new goodies he had obtained, he had decided to just relax and take a vacation from all of that, and just be like all the other ordinary little normal boys out there for once. He took on a rueful look, thinking that there was a certain irony that after all this time of being happy that he was Abnormal, he would still appreciate, sometimes even crave moments to be normal, the very thing he had run from.

He had decided to just spend a few days lazing about, maybe sow a few holes in his socks, sketch some of the scenery, and cook.

In fact, that was what he was doing now.

Over a cheerfully burning fire sat a large pot on a stand and in the large pot, or cauldron really, as his had nicked the equipment from The Vault's potions equipment room (and as much as he was looking to forget all that for a moment, he couldn't deny useful tools) in the pot was a bubbling chunky sauce made of a variety of diced vegetables, including swede, carrots, onions, cauliflower and gherkins being pickled in a sauce made from vinegar, tomato, apple and dates with spices such as mustard, coriander, garlic, cinnamon, pepper, cloves, nutmeg and cayenne pepper with sugar (2).

It had taken him awhile to find all the ingredients over his travels, but with the help of numerous storage containers and his shrinking ability, he could carry a grocery store's worth of food on him quite easily.

Whenever he hit populated areas, he always made sure to get a few things here and there that he could not otherwise get out in the wild. With his new collection of magical preservative jars, he would be able to now get perishables like cheese, milk, and eggs, even ice cream! And not have to worry about it going bad. He wouldn't have to dry out his fish or eat it right away, or get the canned stuff anymore either as well. He would be able to hunt and fish to his heart's content!

Harry had decided to use some of his ingredients to make some pickled Chutney. While he had not been allowed to have it at the Dursleys, he'd fallen in love with it during his travels through his home country. He had developed a taste for cheese and pickle sandwiches, and had enjoyed many hearty Ploughmen's lunch (though without the alcohol of course and only when he could get his hands on some eggs) it was one of the things he missed about his home country. As much as he enjoyed expanding his palate, he had to admit there were a few things he enjoyed that were reminders of where one comes from (3).

He was just scrubbing his cauldron in the river after jarring and shrinking the last of his pickled chutney when something came rushing out of the bushes. They both froze; Harry with a jar full of
pickle and another boy with white blond hair and twigs sticking out of the slick locks.

The boy eyed Harry's camp, his worn cloths, his numerous piles of socks awaiting patching and sniffed disdainfully, raising a pointed nose and chin in the air.

"Just my luck all that time walking around and all I find is some peasant boy."

Harry stared at the finely dressed youth for a moment, before his lip twitched and then he burst out laughing.

"Hey!" the boy yelled, "don't laugh at me!"

Harry laughed harder, and the boy's nose came down a notch and his face flushed in both anger and embarrassment.

"What do you know anyway?" the boy huffed, grabbing a boulder close to Harry's fire and sitting primly.

Harry, amusement clear in his voice stated casually, "oh, I don't know a whole lot, but I do know where I am."

The blond boy slumped a bit at that, flushing again.

Eventually Harry's amusement faded and he said, a little friendlier, "are you lost?"

The boy sneered at him, but grudgingly nodded and explained reluctantly, "my father needed to pick up a rare ingredient for my godfather and had to visit this merlin forsaken island to harvest some- why father bet he could win at chess with uncle Severus was distinctly foolish, he's a champion! And he brought me along as mother is in France and father had business in the Aegadian Islands and wished me to observe. Father was obtaining some of the ingredient when I thought I thought I saw a Purple Breasted Royal snake (4), and wanted to catch it to give to my godfather, as he is rather fond of rare venom, but I soon became lost and my query got away."

There was silence for a moment as Harry contemplated the brief family dynamics of an obviously wealthy family and some posh eccentric chef, or mad scientist, godfather. Before he finally said "no need to worry really, I spent a lot of time in places like this and I can assure you that your father can't be far. What type of ingredient is he after?"

"Blood Dagger Mushrooms," the blond boy sighed, not able to hide his relief.

Harry hummed thoughtfully, "I don't know what those are really, but I think I have seen something like what it sounds like while I was out for a walk yesterday."

Harry got up and gestured for the boy to follow him.

It wasn't long before they crested yet another hill, the blond prat was sweaty and wheezing a lot by that point, obviously not used to all the exercise he had been getting lately, then Harry spotted a rather impressive, though oddly dressed, blond man who looked like a grown up version of the blond snob.

"That him?" he checked, and the boy nodded relieved, "well good then, I have to be off. Have fun with your fungus I suppose."

The blond boy whirled around to state that he didn't play with fungus, but the mysterious rude peasant boy was gone.
The blond blinked, looking around but the boy could not be seen, and he was soon distracted from the odd disappearance when his father strode up to him, looking relieved and began lecturing him about wandering off.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry had decided to take a ferry instead of body bubbling, because he wanted to avoid being cooped up for a bit, and left from a port in Kamma, spending the last of his euros, and got off at Marsalla in the island of Sicily, and According to a book he had acquired from a gift shop:

"...Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea; along with surrounding minor islands, it constitutes an autonomous region of Italy, and it is officially referred to as Regione Siciliana (Sicilian Region). Sicily is located in the central Mediterranean..." (5).

The central Mediterranean was an area that Harry had decided to focus on for this leg of his trip before he began to move steadily northward. He decided, as he had during his time on Pantelleria, he would expand his more mundane skills, and the various locations available in Central Mediterranean offered the best places to do so. Sicily in particular was excellent for his purposes as it has a rich and unique culture, especially in things that Harry was interested in expanding upon such as delving more into his appreciation of the arts and architecture. Harry was also keen to visit the various archeological and ancient sites such as the Necropolis of Pantalica, the Valley of the Temples and Selinunte. He used to enjoy history in school, and had been developing a bit of a taste for it, as was somewhat necessary when delving into mythology. (6)

It was the cooking that he was looking forward to expanding the most though, according to his book:

"...The island has a long history of producing a variety of noted cuisines and wines, to the extent that Sicily is sometimes nicknamed God's Kitchen ..." (7).

Harry thought that was pretty impressive, and was looking forward to seeing if that was true. His times of near starvation at the Dursley's had left him with a great appreciation for food, and a place that boasted such a claim was close to mecca for a boy like Harry. He bet he could sneak into quite a few kitchens, oh yes; especially as apparently every part of Sicily has its food specialty such as a food called Cassata (which is a type of rather fancy cake that looked like mini one tiered works of art) were typical of the city of Palermo, and there is Granita which is a specialty of Catania which is a semi-frozen dessert made from sugar, water and various flavorings and Harry would later discover quite refreshing. (8)

Harry was eager to experiment with the ingredients available which had been described in his book as rich in taste. Many of the dishes of Sicily are viewed by consumers to be particularly healthy, using fresh vegetables and fruits, such as tomatoes, artichokes, olives (including olive oil, the most popular oil base in the area), citrus, apricots, aubergines, onions, beans, and raisins commonly coupled with seafood which Harry was curious to try, having never thought to combine those two before, but always eager to expand his seafood experience. The Seafood, Harry's primary diet base, would consist of tuna, sea bream, sea bass, cuttlefish, swordfish, sardines, and others. (8)

Harry spent week's wandering from town to town, city to city in a state of bliss.

He went through several stacks of sketch books as he drew image after image of sprawling green covered mountains, jewel calm coastlines, thousands of years old buildings and other breathtaking architectures. He also had stacks of photo albums were his post card collection was steadily growing and a book shelf's worth of cook books and notebooks with recipes that made him practically salivate with anticipation.
He had expanded his skills by peeking in on restaurants, observing numerous food vendors and many of the open markets and had developed a good hand, if he did say so himself, at food prepping, particularly with the knives.

While he was learning a great deal, he also took the time to relax and watch a little of the local recreations, such as sneaking into stadiums and watching football games, one of the most popular sports on the island, which, according to Harry's self-taught expansion into history, was introduced in the late 19th century under the influence of the English and football is deeply embedded in local culture, all over Sicily each town has its own representative team (7).

Harry was also able to observe local celebrations, some of which were Feast Days, which are marked by colorful processions through the streets with marching bands and displays of fireworks, in celebration of each town and city's own patron saint. The colourful, nearly iridescent floats in some cases were Harry's favorite part of those days. (7)

Harry was enjoying his time in Sicily, and it would be quite a while before he would move on.

Ooo ooo ooo

February 16th, Heading into the mainland of Italy, Harry is Age 10...

Harry had never stayed in a country so long! Particularly in just one part, no matter how big!

His time had certainly been fruitful, and he was proud to say that his Italian was particularly strong, out of all the languages he had attempted to teach himself so far. He was glad that he had delayed his trip further North to linger and learn.

As much as he loved Sicily though, he'd finally felt the urge to move on, and had turned his sights further North. He had yet to decide which country to visit next, so he had decided to take a lazy coastal flight, skirting along the edges of Italy's seaside, figuring it was as good as any.

Harry was in the city of Pescara which was on the coast of the Adriatic Sea, having long since leaving the Mediterranean behind. He was enjoying the relatively calm midnight flight a little further out to sea. He was contemplating whether he should continue flying up the coast, take a body bubble, or a ferry across to Croatia, when something caught his eye.

He halted mid-flight, moving closer towards the surface of the water halting a way's up and stared at the unusual sight below.

It was a glowing whirlpool, a rather distinctive sight as the rest of the waters remained calm and inky black, reflecting the clear starry sky and moon back at Harry.

Harry had no idea what it was, but it was strangely beautiful, swirling greenish-blue, silver and whites.

Harry's lingering ended up being his downfall, literally, as a great giant brackish tentacle suddenly shot out of the water and wrapped around his waist.

Harry narrowed his eyes. With a yell, he set the beast's grabby appendage ablaze in hungry orange flames.

The creature quickly released him, and the tentacle sank under the waves, though this time it was replaced by at least 11 more towering over him. They moved rather quickly for something so large, and despite Harry's efforts with his fire, there would still be others to replace what he burned, and the flames never did very much damage, to quickly snuff out.
He also found that whatever it was could not be effected by sizing, happy feet, or anything else he had on hand. It was either immune to it or it was just too big or both.

Eventually, the thing managed to catch him around the middle again with a tentacle and began reeling Harry towards the water.

He had no other option but one and that was to face whatever it was underneath the waves. Perhaps he could escape from it there.

He managed to free one hand and reached into the pocket of his back pack, grabbing two vials. One filled with gillyweed, the other empty.

He did 2 things in quick succession.

One, he shrunk his backpack and stored it tightly inside the empty vial, sticking it in one of the numerous pockets of a pair of khaki pants he'd been wearing.

Two, he uncorked the other vial, unshrinking some of its contents, and swallowed the sample of gillyweed that he'd been planning to experiment with but hadn't gotten around to it yet. He grimaced at the slimy rubbery taste as he quickly hung the vial from a chain around his neck he'd started wearing to hold quickly needed things like a pouch with money and other immediate supplies.

He swallowed and the waves closed over his head. He hoped this worked.

The first thing Harry acknowledged was that yes, he wasn't drowning.

The second thing he noticed was the creature itself.

The thing had the body of a great humpback whale with a crab-like shell on its back, a dark reddish black colour, and a set of six tentacles on either side of what Harry assumed was the head, like a horrible nightmarish mane that dragged him towards a beak-like mouth filled with razor sharp Buick sized teeth.(9)

And did he mention how big it was? It was like being caught by a small monstrous island that wanted to eat him.

He writhed and struggled futilely. The grip on him was tight this time.

Harry was just about to see his life flash before his eyes when a voice interrupted the climax of his death or near death as the case may be.

"Rura! How many times have I told you? We do not eat other guest members!"

The irritated female voice was followed by a sharp looking spear stabbing the tentacle holding Harry, passing inches from his nose.

The creature let out a noise that was more vibration then anything, making his teeth rattle in his head, but thankfully let him go.

He quickly swam free and took a moment to float and catch back those lost years off his life with a few deep breaths through his new gills.

The new addition to the party was, like the thing that tried to eat him, definitely an abnormal.

From waist up, she looked relatively human shaped, but that was as far as he could go in saying such. Here hair was ash grey filaments that looked more like hundreds of thin fin trails like the kind
found on those fancy looking fish he saw during his numerous dives. She had iron grey scaly skin and a long torso that was more reminiscent of an eel, very lean and without much in the way of curves. Her face was relatively human, oval shaped, but with large white-less black eyes. Her arms were long and appeared to have an extra elbow or two, and the fingers were also long and many jointed and webbed. (10)

The lower half was octopus-like and a darker slate grey with dark navy stripes.

The woman (?) huffed, blowing a stream of irritated bubbles out her frilled nostrils, watching as the creature slunk away before turning to Harry and taking him in.

"Well, we don't see to many of your sort around, I hadn't thought there was any more Gillmen (11) willing to attend these little summits we have every 5 years or so, especially so young! Still, I suppose that experience breeds maturity and viable mates so I can't really fault you for wanting to attend, though you probably should have waited for a local fresh water ball, not to many Freshies attend these things, especially ones with the ability to switch between salt water and fresh water as you seem to be able to."

She grinned, revealing teeth rather similar to the creature that had just left them, though on a much smaller scale.

Harry let out a stream of relieved bubbles, scratching at his own flowing black hair nervously, eyeing the spear she had re-shouldered, it looked wicked sharp.

He paused, before trying to explain anything, finally noticing his elongated fingers and toes that had become webbed and the frilled gills on either side of his neck, huh.

"Kraken," she supplied with a proud smirk, as she gestured to the sulking creature that had been denied it's snack, "you Freshies probably have never even seen one before. You should be lucky that you weren't a seal of the non-magical sort or you would have been eaten long ago."

'Kraken,' he mentally moaned, and discreetly gulped. He'd heard about it from a book he had read on Scandinavian mythos. They were giant sea creatures that supposedly ate ships.

"Well, well! A Freshie and a newbie! An ignorant one at that! How perfectly delightful! You shall accompany me then. You're in luck that you happened across the one being in all the waters that has a fin on the current of our marvelous world and all those who swim in it."

Harry was beginning to wonder if he really was so lucky, but he didn't want to arouse suspicion if he tried to refuse her and return to the surface, and she was rather intimidating and she had saved him from the Kraken so he couldn't really use his abilities against her, even if he was unsure how they would work underwater, so he was given no choice but to follow the…whatever she was.

"Since you have apparently never seen a Kraken, I suppose you haven't heard of my people or my vaunted self. I am the Lady Mung, third daughter of Queen Zel and ambassador to the Water Herders. We are the children of Pontus and the Kraken. My people specialize in communicating and controlling the creatures of the sea and oceans."

Harry nodded along as she regaled him with stories about her various adventures with herding various sea creatures until she was given the honour and duty to oversee Yagb, the oldest Kraken of the heard.

"…and so I told the siren (12) if she wanted the dolphin she would just have to take her overblown attitude and…” Mung paused in her conversation when she noticed Harry's goggled eyed look that
wasn't pointed at her this time.

Before them was what looked like a field of various angled whirlpools of light, and from those pools emerged various creatures, people, and all in-between. It was like being on the freeway for all things water based fantasy.

"Ah! You spotted the Hub. These are clustered gates that are created by various persons and channeled from various locations all over the world to allow for those coming to the summit to attend without traveling over great distances. We time it so the air breathers do not notice our presence."

She guided him forward by grabbing his wrist and weaving through the rather crowded setting. At one point they past dangerously close to being squashed between two whales that sang out swear words in their direction, and were forced to wait long enough that Harry was discreetly dipping into his second dose of gillyweed when he felt the tell-tale warnings of it wearing off (1 hour and 35 minutes, good batch!) as a very old and stately water dragon, with gleaming silver scales flowed lazily by, followed by a contingent of smaller and less grand water dragons and magical sea serpents.

They were all converging upon one particular point, a deep dark crevice that was protected by overarching jagged rocks like thousands of clawed fingers.

Inside, Harry couldn't help gasping at what he beheld. It was a sprawling citadel of hundreds, if not thousands of glowing bluish coloured spheres of various hues, heights and sizes all connected by iridescent pale greenish thread-looking tubes all surrounding in a loose necklace around a tall tower of spheres, one on top of another with a large trident made of what looked like diamond.

"A stunning sight is it not?" Mung chuckled, amused by his expression, "The Crown of the Sea, or simply The Crown, was a citadel created by the most ancient of us, some even say the first of us, as a place where all water dwelling beings can be given voice. It is a neutral place and the rulers change hands every century or so, appointed by the council. The city also houses the highest concentration of Water Mages, Elemental land dwellers that are cousins, of a sort, to wizards and witches, though they separated some time ago, with the other Elementals, and now dwell in the oceans, seas, and lakes where they lend their powers to such things as the creation of the Hub, allowing all water dwellers, no matter their home, to come and go here. They also use their magic to hide us all from the land dwellers that they left behind so many eons ago. If you're lucky you might actually spot one in a crowd, they very rarely intermingle with others outside their conclaves."

Harry was dragged along by his wrist as they converged upon the underwater metropolis while the friendly and overly talkative Herder continued to explain things, obviously having come to the conclusion that Harry was a rather ignorant entrant. Which Harry was, deeply so, but incorrect in why he was so ignorant.

Harry couldn't help goggling like the newbie she thought him, as he beheld great heaving water serpents of all shapes and species, stately and wild people of little to no dress with flowing hair and beards, or no hair at all, some floating as easily as he flew in the air, others sitting or standing on carriages, floats, and chariots pulled by underwater creatures such as large fish, octopi, giant eels…so many he couldn't name. One man in splendid silks and a golden crown was sitting lotus style on the back of what looked like a crocodile. (13)

Harry soon noticed that the largest crowd of Abnormals he has ever seen were queuing up in front of various sections of those thread-like tubes.

"These are the pipes. I am sure they had a more majestic name sometime back, but some land walker slang has a habit of making its way even into our terminologies. Anyway, these tubes are condensed magically created currents that operate on vocal commands and take you to wherever you want."
Since you're new, just follow me."

Harry, not that he really had a choice, still in her clutches and all, nodded, still rather to intimidated to say anything.

Soon, it is their turn, after a rather large hefty merman disappears from their view.

"Alright, all you have to do is lay your hand on the surface of the pipe, state clearly "Reception Hall" and it will take you to the reception hall, it's where we will be assigned our quarters for the duration of our stay."

Harry nodded again and watched as the Kraken Herder went first and lay her webbed, talon tipped hand on the glowing bluish surface and clearly stated "Reception hall!" and was sucked in through the surface of the pipe and whisked away.

It was Harry's turn next. He took a moment to take another bite of his gillyweed before he lay his hand on the surface. It felt like touching a water balloon filled with warm water.

He opened his mouth to say "Reception Hall!" only then, too late, did he realize to that because he had not been able to get a word in edgewise beforehand to test himself out, he could not speak. Only a stream of bubbles escaped his mouth.

With a sinking sensation, he was to late also in removing his hand from catastrophe as he was sucked into the pipe and whisked away to what he was sure was not going to be the Reception Hall.

Chapter End Notes

February 16th, The Crown, Harry is currently Age 10...

Harry was pulled along so fast he was barely able to keep his watery breath.

Harry remembered a time when he had snuck into a water park while he had been in Spain, and had slid down an enclosed water slide.

The sensation was familiar in the Pipe, but for the addition of the sensation of being dragged along with a condensed undertow.

He was just beginning to wonder if he was doomed to die in the thing when he was unceremoniously spat out.

He whirled for a moment in the darkish grey pool, before he caught himself.

Wherever he was, it was vast and appeared to be empty, with arched grey walls and a rounded floor of similar material. He then spied a light above his head and swam for it.

He peeked his eyes above the surface, careful to keep his gills in the water, relieved at first that there were spaces in this place that were fortunately filled with air that he could utilize when he wanted to give his gillyweed a supply a break; then he spied something that did not reassure him.

He appeared to be in a large amphitheatre of some kind were the entire field was a great pool of water with islands of crystal platforms. On those platforms, the largest most monstrous looking crabs Harry had ever seen, the size of Buicks!, were hiss-gurgling at each other, apparently in the middle of some sort of battle, their tree top sized claws clacking threateningly (1).

Harry let out a soundless meep.

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, the surrounding stands were filled with yelling crowds of aquatic based Abnormals, cheering and jeering the giant crabs on and had yet to notice the lone boy stuck in the battle zone.

Harry quickly dived back under.

He looked frantically around. There was nowhere for him to hide.

Perhaps he would be lucky and the giant crustations of potential doom would keep their battle to above the surface.

For a time, as muffled echoes of battle ricocheted above him, it seemed luck was with him, and he used the small window to catch his breath and apply his brain to how exactly he was going to return to the surface, as in terra firma surface.

But as hard as he tried to think of a way to get out of this mess, the only thing he could think of was to approach one of these people and tell them his problem. He wasn’t keen on this plan as he remembered what had happened in that castle in Spain. He remembered the tone that the Kraken Shepherd had in her voice when she mentioned "Landwalker," a sort of contempt. No, he was quite
sure he classified as a Landwalker from her perspective, despite his present state, so that was not a good idea. Chances were high he would get eaten by something for his troubles.

The only other way was to somehow find an exit, avoid the attention of anymore Abnormals that might be outside, and make his frantic way to the surface.

The later plan seemed to be his best bet, though he was uncertain how to go about that.

He was afraid to try the pipe again, in case he ended up somewhere worse, for all he knew he could end up in a stable full of sharks or something.

His contemplations were ended rather abruptly when the waters were suddenly filled with writhing fighting crab.

He yelped a long stream of bubbles as he began dodging flying claws.

After he got knocked by a stray leg for a third time in a row, Harry'd had enough.

Ooo ooo ooo

Keto (1) prided herself on centuries of quality when it came to producing her products. She herself had produced some of the most infamous monsters on the planet.

And like with any situation that held deadly monsters and board Supernaturals, this eventually lead to The Games.

Great versus battles that the cream of her latest crops would provide the bored or disgruntled water dwellers while they cheered jeered and laid bets of their most precious treasures, hoards, and the occasional first born.

At the present moment, in one of the numerous arenas at the gathering of the annual summit of the various water dwelling powers of the world, she had decided to open up festivities with her latest generation of Carcinus. They were a particularly aggressive pair of males as well, and decedents from the original Carcinus Cancer that she had lent to Hera. Luckily she’d been able to breed her before that meat head Hercules crushed her poor baby (2).

The latest generations though, were even stronger than their predecessor, and she felt confident that no single being, with the exception of a select few, could defeat them in battle.

The crowds loved it as well, as the bets and favors were flying fast and hard. Her slice of empire was going to feast well on the profits and favors obtained during this year’s summit as many powerful and rich fools looking to burn a little something or other.

Keto smirked from her throne of volcanic rock and whale bone.

Then she froze and gasped along with everyone else as the two powerful sea monsters were suddenly lifted out of the water and sent flying directly towards the roof of the arena in a blaze of intense red light.

Spectators unfroze as the giant crustaceans, singed along the edges and knocked out cold began falling from the large dent they had made in the roof and directly towards the stands.

People dived towards the waters; some cast shimmering shields of aquatic energy and others ran or crawled up walls to avoid the falling bodies.
Keto also unfroze and uncoiled her large frilled snake-like body, the upper humanoid half raising and all four of her long triple joined muscular arms in the air and screeching in rage at both the defeat of her babies, and the interruption of the festivities (3).

Later, with the haphazard crowds in the waters of the fighting zone, it was difficult to find who the culprit had been. But when she did, she was going to make whoever it was paid dearly!

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry thought he would never get out of their alive!

He had not wanted to use the Extremity Explosion, but like last time, he had been to discombobulated to think straight, seeing how he was about to either get crushed or eaten at any moment and had just reacted.

Luckily for him, when the spectators fled the falling carcasses, enough of them had jumped into the waters that he was able to quickly disappear amongst the throng and was soon shown out by a group of armoured men with froglike legs and sharks for heads who seemed to be some form of security (4).

He hastily grabbed onto the trailing rim of an overweight mermaid's tail when he overheard her tell her equally overweight friend that they might as well head back to the reception room, now that the festivities were over.

Of course, he got a wallop upside the head with her clam shell purse calling him a bottom feeding leech for some reason when she finally noticed his clinging form before he swam off quickly upon their arrival to the Reception Hall.

He was swooped up just as quickly by the kraken shepherd, and never was he more relieved to see the intimidating chatterbox.

"There you are! I was beginning to worry that you got lost in the shuffle somehow! Come on, we got to get you registered...you know, I never caught your name?" she suddenly asked as she dragged him towards another of those frog shark men, though this armored individual was sitting behind a raised desk, seeing people one at a time.

When Harry's turn in the queue came he was unceremoniously pushed forward and the guard chirred out boredly, "name, species, and specs please."

Harry bit his lip. This was awkward.

The man finally focused on him when Harry didn't say anything, narrowing slanted round dark eyes and barked out the demand again.

Harry grimaced and touched his throat and then his mouth and shook his head.

"Oh! your mute!" the Shepard said out loud in realization, and rather uncomfortably loud in Harry's opinion as they were attracting stares, he flushed.

The man behind the counter huffed a few annoyed bubbles.

"Fine then, just nod or shake your head for yes and no all right? "

Harry nodded, relieved that the…whatever he was, at least competent at his job.
"Since you can't tell me your name, you'll be designated "Guest 369" for your stay." Harry nodded, not planning to stay long, so they could call him what they liked. The man wrote it down.

"Now as for your species, you look like a Gillman, but in the off chance I am wrong, we'll call you a species unknown," Harry nodded and he wrote it down (5).

"Now as for specs, you breathe through gills but is that a permanent thing or can it appear and reappear when you're in and out of water?"

Since Harry figured that was actually technically true, he again nodded his head.

"Hmmm…Halfling then," the man wrote a few more things down (6).

Finally after one or two more things that had to do with food and water temperature, he was given a plain looking shell on a chain with odd squally marks on it.

"There, Room 42, next to your loud companion, NEXT!"

Harry nodded a hasty thank you and swam off to let other impatient people be registered.

He pulled the shell on, thinking it was better to help him blend in.

Luckily, his new friend, after apologizing for not realizing his handicap sooner (not that he would've gotten a chance to really) drew him to a circular section of round knobliss doors and archways.

He watched as she laid her shell against the door and it sunk inwards; retiring to her own quarters after wishing him a cheerful rest period.

He tried it on the left hand door and was pleased that it appeared to be the correct one as he sank through as if it were air.

He was beyond relieved when he discovered that his room had a non-water section of breathable air.

Just in time to. His latest dose of Gillyweed had just worn off and he was looking forward to breathing normally again.

He crawled onto a simple chaise lounge that was perched on a small shelf of pale marble at the edge of a pool and fell deeply asleep, utterly exhausted from his experience.

Ooo ooo ooo

February 17th, The Crown, Visitor's Quarters…

He woke up to shrieking.

"By the First Beast!" a distinctly female high pitched chitter-like nails on a chalkboard voice exclaimed.

Harry fell off the chaise and onto the hard marble floor with a painful thump.

He groaned and sluggishly pulled himself upward, groaning, looking around for the source of the noise.

His eyes landed on Mung, whose upper torso was sticking out of the water. It looked like she had paid him a surprise visit.
"So," she stated in her ear bleeding accented voice that Harry determined must be what her voice sounded like outside of the water, "the Registrar was right, you are a Halfling then? Or perhaps wandering water elemental that had developed the ability to take on a more proper form for water?"

Harry let out a mental sigh of relief. He didn't quite grasp what she meant, but at least she didn't suspect him of being a human of the non-water variety.

After a moment, he just nodded, not able to come up with anything else, and even if he had, he would not be able to tell her. He had a feeling English would either not be understood, or if it was, would reveal him for the Landwalker he was.

"Well, you should have said…oh, right, well, come on then, we better hurry if we want to get good seats for the summit meeting. I hear it's going to be quite interesting this year. Scuttle-swim is that some of the big names will be in attendance this year, not just their representatives, so hurry it up limp weed."

With that, she dived under the water, fortunately, which left Harry enough time to grab a mouth full of Gillyweed.

This time, he stuck close to Mung and held onto a bit of her trailing body armor as they were sucked through another pipe and spat out into a huge cavern that was slowly filling with people and creatures.

It was a rather impressive setup, the place was the size of several football stadiums. According to Mung, it was the central building that was in the center of the bustling underwater metropolis. It was a rotunda that had slightly slopping walls with funnel-shaped room which they had entered was lined with various sized clam shaped seats arranged in concentric patterns from floor to ceiling, which soared over a hundred meters high. The center of the vast chamber was dominated by a podium used by what Harry assumed were for speakers. Everything was made of gleaming opalescent materials that reflected luminescent blue moss that circled the seats and walls in intricate symbols and signs that Harry had no idea the meaning of. The podium itself was an eye catching number of polished lava rock of dark rainbows tipped in silver webbing with a glowing silver circle. Mung explained that the podium had magic imbued into it that allowed for the speaker to be heard by everyone in the room, and translate for the various languages that existed among the Denizens (Denizens was what Harry was learning the underwater Abnormals referred to themselves collectively). When a person wished to address the rest they were able to detach their seat from its magically connected berth and move out into the open space of the chamber on a magically automated path to connect to the pavilion so they can say their piece.

They spent an hour wait watching the various different peoples take their seats.

In fact, just above his head he had witnessed what looked like a female teenager with beautiful ash coloured hair and pale green skin with prominent blood red vein-like markings all over that gave her a rather sinister appearance. She wore flowing green skirts that moved lazily in the waters around them and settled around long shapely legs giving a hint of greenish fin and overlong webbed toes.

"That's a Rusalka," Mung explained, noticing the direction of his curious gaze, "one of the various sub-groups of the Water Demons. Her kind likes to go up onto land and lure Landwalkers to their doom upon occasion, usually territory encroaches. They can change their looks enough to walk among them for a short time, but tend to not do enough of a job of it, as they have been reputed among the Landwalkers of their regions to be restless spirits," she snickered. Harry turned his gaze away when the Rusalka turned glowing acid green eyes, and nothing else, in their direction suspiciously.
Mung pointed to another person, three seats down and to the left that had long hair with green skin and long finger nails wearing some sort pouch around the front of his upper torso.

"That's a Qalupalik, they wear an amautiit (which is a form of pouch that active parents wear to carry their children) so that they can take babies and children that they find alone and parentless. They convert the children they find into one of their own through prolonged contact with their skin and auras. It's how they reproduce. Rumour has it that they are not averse to taking Landwalker children," She wrinkled her nose (8).

Harry moved a little closer to Mung.

Noticing this, she laughed, "no worries, looks like he is already occupied," she pointed to the bulge that moved around in said pouch, "they never take more than one child or two infants at most."

She spent the rest of the time explaining various beings that were seated around them.

"Oh, there is a group of Naiads, a sub-group of Nymphs who live in streams, wells, brooks and other small bodies of water. They prefer no adornments whatsoever. It's rumored that Poseidon enjoys their company a fair bit. You never see the males though; they are kept well protected by their females." (9)

"...that's a group of Feux Follets," she pointed to various different seats that held vaguely humanoid tiny balls of glowing lights of various colours, "they are magical constructions that were created by ancient Water Elementals many millennia ago and eventually bred themselves and became a species all their own. They are favored among a wide variety of the Denizens and I am told among other land and sky dwelling beings, though they go by different names above water. They are used for sending messages or memorizing and then displaying events that they witness. The ones you see here are those representing groups or powerful individuals who can't make the summit, so they send the Feux Follets so nothing important is missed."(10) That was how they wiled away the hour, and by the time it was ready to start, Harry had learned of over 30 different water Abnormals, both individuals and species. Soon a group of fancier shell seats, these ones obvious by the fact that they were encrusted with gold, formed a loose ring around the central point. "Those are some of the most influential and powerful of us, ones that decided not to take the Long Sleep or are otherwise unavailable," Mung whispered in his ear quietly, "the first on the right is Poseidon," she gestured to ripped man with skin as golden as the shells with curly hair and beard that seemed to be a shiny turquoise. He wore a crown circlet of silver on his head and fancy looking armor of diamonds. Harry knew of him of course. Poseidon is one of the twelve Olympian deities of the pantheon in Greek mythology, brother of Zeus, king of the gods. His main home is the ocean, additionally he is referred to as "Earth-Shaker" humans attributing his role in causing earthquakes, and has been called the "tamer of horses." Sure enough, Harry saw what appeared to be an etching of raging stallions with manes of foam rearing on his chest. "He likes to change his hair and beard all the time, I hear. A bit of a drama fish if you ask me…anyway, the one next to him is the captain of the Flying Duchman."

The next being was also male, though he looked like a rather unkempt ghost.

"Still likes to haunt the occasional Landwalker port and scare the mortal lives out of them from time to time, and the one next to him IsIleana Cosanzeana. She is the current ruler of one of the most powerful families of Salt Water Fairies." Harry observed that her eyes looked like the sun, her body was neither to thin nor to fat, but in the middle of proportions, and her garments are made of some type of pinkish white flowers, "Pearls and gold flow out of her mouth when she sings. She is also said to use her power of white magic to heal or revive. She is one of the most powerful healers under water. She is greatly respected by everyone. Very few bar her path, even though she prefers to dwell in enchanted flower fields on land."(11)(12)

The next one was…Harry blinked. It was a calmly seated cow. Unlike regular cows though, this one
was built more lean and had pale tan scales under its shaggy golden tan hide. It also had three primly curled translucent horns on either side of its head.

"That is a Buwch Frech, it looks like a new Moa (queen) this year, the previous one must have retired finally." (13)

Next to the water cow was Gong Gong who had red hair and the tail of a serpent. Mung explained that he is often seen as destructive and is blamed for various cosmic catastrophes. Gong Gong ends up being nearly killed or sent into exile, usually after losing a struggle with another major deity. (14)

Next to him was curled an actual dragon, (Harry squealed internally) like the kind that Harry had seen in some of his more Asian oriented stories. It had a long snake like body and emerald coloured scales. Mung said that his name was Ao Guang, a dragon lord. According to Mung he was actually much larger, but he was able to adjust his own size so that he didn't overwhelm the assembly.(15)

The next person was Dakuwaqa, who was a muscular man in a simple grey loin cloth with the upper body of a shark, a tiger shark by the looks of it. He was a shark god, and father to the race of Sharkrogs that provided the crew and security to the great city and was also the current ruler of it. He was apparently on good terms with Keto, who Harry had seen already, recognized from descriptions, and was sitting in the next seat over from the shark god. Keto was well known as the mother of many monsters, both water and land. In her lap sat an ugly looking creature that Mung told him was her latest Grindy Low model Harry would later learn was a common pet amongst many of the Denizens, created by Keto, and something of a purse dog type of thing like what Harry had seen famous actresses on the occasional news article. Harry noted that said being looked vastly annoyed, and he hoped that it wasn't because of the giant lobster battle he had interrupted yesterday. (16) (17)

Eventually all the seats had filled and the summit was called to order.

What followed was what felt to be a half a day's worth of boredom.

At first, Harry had been rather interested in what might happen, after all these were beings from folklore and legends, hundreds, maybe even thousands of Abnormals all in one place of all different varieties! It was mind boggling to Harry's academic side.

Sadly for the boy though, it was all rather mundane chitter chatter that talked about this upset and that territory and so on and so forth, Supernatural bureaucracy in its finest.

It only got interesting near the end when there was, what his friend whispered in his ear was an annual thing common to the summit, an overall vote as to whether the Earth should be flooded again (apparently it had been done before), as the Landwalkers tended to get to big for their feet and made things difficult for Denzians.

Fortunately for the unknowing Landwalkers, the vote was more in favor of not flooding then flooding, thankfully for Harry's peace of mind. According to Mung though, the gap between the votes had been growing shorter every summit for the last century or so.

Finally the meeting was adjourned and Harry was relieved. Unfortunately his hopes of slipping away and trying to find a way out were nixed when Mung caught hold of his wrist and dragged him to some sort of giant room where the people who had attended the senate were chattering among themselves as what looked like stately half eel half men in cummerbunds were gliding around with serving trays full of unusual foods that Harry thought it best to avoid, as some of it wriggled. (18)

Harry stuck close to Mung as soon as he was trapped in the crowds, as many looked rather intimidating as well as important.
A few of the guests that Mung gossiped with cooed at her companion's adorableness, but otherwise eventually left him alone when they realized he couldn't do more than nod or shake his head.

It was as Mung was talking adamantly with a rather severe looking Merman with biceps the size of Harry's head that someone bumped into him and something heavy and mushy plopped into his hair.

"Oops! There goes my seaweed stuffed jellyfish snack, I do apologize young man," Harry grimaced as he tried to get the sticky stuff from clinging to his follicles as he looked to the side, then upwards at the tall man that floated serenely within a hairs breath of him.

He was certainly tall, and one of the most human looking of the water based Abnormals yet. He was dressed in tight scaly looking greyish pants, barefooted with a golden brace on his lower legs and a sleeveless shirt of the same tightness and make over a lean chest with golden chains imbued with black pearls crisscrossing the front and back and a high open collar. His hair was long and hung loose under the cowl of a misty greyish green cloak that somehow managed to remain tightly close to his body and yet flare just enough to give him presence and room, and casting his angular features that were a pale shell white, in a bit of shadow.

"Lord Mage Waven!" the Mermen and Mung exclaimed in unison, bowing their heads in politeness. Harry followed a second later, not really sure what this was about.

"It seems we have a rather young man attending the summit today," the man drawled, his dark navy eyes fixed on Harry's green intently.

"Oh yes!" Mung explained, "My friend here...I can't rightly remember his name now that I think of it," Harry snorted a few bubbles, knowing that the reason was mainly because she had neither asked for his name nor been able to tell her even if she did ask of it, "he had a run in with my Kraken along the way, he's a Halfling from the fresh waters I think."

"Really?" the man mused, though his look never wavered from Harry, "well I hope you don't mind if I borrow him then? I have not meant many fresh water Halflings before."

"You Water Elementals are all academics," the Merman huffed, taking a bite from his own snack.

Mung chuckled as well, though a bit more politely and nodded, "Of course Lord Waven, just be aware though that my young friend here is unable to speak while in his proper form."

"That will not be a problem Shepard, I know of a place we can converse dryly, come along child," and Harry was unceremoniously grabbed and dragged along behind the man as they glided through the crowds until they were in a stretch of abandoned hallway, then he was dragged down even darker hallways and Harry suddenly became even more weary. The expression on the Water Elemental's face darkened with the setting.

Eventually they arrived in a sunken chamber that was doughnut shaped and at the very center was the truly odd thing. A small raised pedestal in the rough shape of an arch with raggedy-looking curtains that swayed in the current of their entrance. The center glowed with swirling dark reds and bruise colored lightening played in the boarders of the arch.

The Elemental whirled him around and snarled into Harry's face.

"I knew that it was only a matter of time before my magical cousins dwelling with the land walkers would try to poke their noses where they are not wanted," the Elemental snarled, shaking him, "but to think that they consider my kind so foolish as to not recognize the bastardized form of Gillyweed? And to take the form of a child!"
Harry sucked in a big gulp of water, freezing. If this stranger knew what Gillyweed was then he knew what Harry was!

He struggled, and with a growl he called up Flame. It didn't set the man's hands on fire, but it caused the water where he grasped harry to boil around his hand, making him let go of Harry with a yelp of pain.

Harry raised his feet.

Extremity Explosion wasn't exactly as quick underwater, and lasted a shorter amount of time but it did the job of putting distance between them.

Unfortunately for Harry, that was mainly because of the force of the backlash, which he had forgotten in his reaction, and it sent him directly for the sinister looking arch. Things went dark after that.

Chapter End Notes

Brace yourself, large source list here.

1. From Greek Mythology, Keto was a marine goddess who personified the dangers of the sea. She was more specifically a goddess of whales, large sharks, and sea-monsters and was the mother to some of the most infamous monsters from Greek mythology. 2. From Greek mythology, Carcinus was a giant crab which assisted the nine-headed serpent Hydra in its battle with Herakles at Lerna, but as a reward for its service, it was placed amongst the stars as the Constellation Cancer by Hera. 3. Keto's image was inspired by a picture I found on the internet, link on my profile, 4. Sharkrogs are guards are made up creatures, though it wouldn't surprise me if they also existed in some lore out there. 5. The missing aquatic link from the movie "Creature from the Black Lagoon.", 6. For the sake of this fic, it is a loose term that the aquatics use, in their context, for beings able to exist both in and out of water, 7. From Slavic mythology, Rusalka is a type of water nymph that was originally considered good by coming out of the water in the spring to transfer life-giving moisture to the fields and thus helped nurture the crops then after the nineteenth century, an unquiet being who is no longer alive, associated with the unclean spirit and is dangerous. Her main purpose is to lure young men, seduced by either her looks or her voice, into the depths, 8. From Inuit Mythology, Qalupalik are humanoid underwater creatures that wear an amautiit so that they can take babies and children away who disobey their parents. The story was used to prevent children from wandering off alone else the qalupalik would take the children in her amautik under water and keep them forever, 9. From Greek Mythology, Naiads were popular mistresses of Poseidon, and held up residence in rivers, lakes, and streams, 10. From Various Mythologies, Feux Follets is the French term for Wispa which are thought to be spirits that lured travelers into bogs and swamps. In France, Catholics belived the souls of unbaptized children amongst many of the views. I based these ones off of a combination between the Wisps from the movie "Brave" and camera recorders, 11. Ileana Cosanjeana is from Romanian Mythology, she is a beautiful good-natured princess. In Romanian folklore, Ileana is the original concept of feminine beauty, the most beautiful amongst the fairies. She is not strictly tied to water based mythos, but her body was described being like the sea, and with pearls falling from her mouth when she spoke, I implied a stronger connection to the sea then in myth, 12. Salt Water Fairies are
made up for the fic, though I know that there are water based fairies in many other myths, though they tend to be primarily in fresh water locations, 13. Buwch Frech is from Welsh Folklore "a cow which was said to give milk to "any one [...] in want of milk" until a witch milked the cow dry. The cow then left, plunging into a lake near Cerrig-y-drudion, and leading her two children, long-horned oxen (which are themselves the subject of other legends), after her."(Wikipedia). The term Moa is made up, 14. Gong Gong is a Chinese water god or sea monster from Chinese mythology, 15. Ao Guang is also from Chinese mythology and is the Dragon King of the East Sea and was in a famous work from the country called "Journey to the West", 16. Dakuwaqa, is a Shark God from Fijian Mythology. He had a good relationship with the local fishermen and was reputed to fight evil sea creatures and protect fishermen, 17. Grindy Lows are from the HP cannon, 18. Eelmen, made up.

*Oh yes, and I forgot to put a reference number in, but the rotunda and its interior was inspired by the Imperial senate meeting place in the "Star Wars Prequels".
Harry stumbled and nearly fell flat on his face but managed to catch himself against damp stone.

He looked around himself, frowning.

He had yet again stumbled by accident into yet another situation, and before he had even managed to extract himself somehow from the previous one he had been in so he was understandably apprehensive when he eyed the small cave he now found himself in, littered with bones of varying variety, though judging by the shape of a few of them, they might have been aquatic in nature.

He wasn't sure if that was indicative of the severity of his situation, or the fact that this place wasn't underwater and they may belong to those who could not breathe outside of H2O.

As his eyes passed by the skeleton of a giant humanoid with teeth like a shark he spotted a patch of red.

He frowned, adjusting his bag, somehow surviving his underwater adventure and coming with him through the swirling vortex of doom, and walked over to the patch of red.

It resolved into an ordinary bright red door.

It was such an incongruous thing to find in such a place that he just goggled at it for a few solid minutes before approaching warily.

He had learned his lesson about curious patches of strangeness with the Kraken business so he smartly stopped a foot or two away from it, studying it.

Despite his intense scrutiny, it remained an ordinary seeming door with a brass doorknob and a garish paint job.

As if it were waiting for his confusion at such a thing to reach a certain peak, the surface of the door shimmered, and where the knocker used to be, a business-like plaque, also brass, with black lettering appeared.

Welcome to the Doorway

Through this door you will find one of three fates:

Trials wrought, Freedom Gained

Trials wrought, Prison Gained

Trials wrought, Death Gained.

If you do not venture, you will die.

If you venture, you may live

Though you may prefer the former.
Harry stared at what he could only assume was a magical plaque of some kind on the door, though it wasn't exactly poetic, in fact it was rather poorly written and blunt.

Harry's eyes nearly bugged when the words faded were replaced by more.

I'm a magical plaque not a bard you moron. Do you want your first clue or not? Since you don't strike me as the sit around and starve to death type.

Harry nearly choked on his spit. A magical mind reading plaque it seemed.

He bit his lip. He could not stay here, that was for sure. The portal that had spat him out was nowhere that he could see, and there was no other obvious way out.

Reading the conclusion most likely from his mind, the words changed again.

Past me lies your first task. To survive the trial you must find a particular basket and carry it to the arch at the other end. Once there you shall receive your next instructions to get through the next trial.

…

Good luck moron.

With that, the plaque faded away, and the door creaked dramatically open (1).

Harry took a breath and girded himself. He just had to get through this…

He growled to himself as he strode forward.

If he ever saw that Elemental again (though highly unlikely) he was going to give him a solid fist in his perfect pearly whites.

Ooo ooo ooo

The location he found himself was actually a pleasant surprise.

It was a beautiful sunny field with wild grass and flowers, even butterflies. There was even a sky and a sun and little fluffy clouds.

It wasn't overly large either, roughly the size of a football field.

The only odd thing was that the place was littered with baskets of varying sizes, shapes, and colours.

He frowned. It couldn't be this easy.

This was something else that Harry had picked up, particularly from The Vault. Nothing was ever as it seems.

Harry pulled off his bag and reached inside and pulled out a stick he had been saving to fashion into a fishing pole and warily poked the side of a nearby lavender coloured basket.

Nothing happened.

He poked another one, an Easter basket with frilly yellow ribbon.

Nothing happened.
When he poked a few more and nothing happened, he put his stick back in his bag. He wearily reached out to grab the rim of the lavender basket, fingers inches from poking inside when Harry spied a blue butterfly idly flutter inside a tall tan coloured basket with bells.

The thing suddenly burst into motion, the rim snapping shut. It sprouted legs and trotted off, bells jingling merrily as it chewed before settling in a new place, rim open wide again.

Harry hastily retracted his hand, glaring at the baskets with trepidation.

"So that's the trick then," he muttered to himself, "carnivores' baskets, nice." (2)

Harry tried lifting a basket with his stick again, by the handle this time, instead of poking them in the sides, and found that trying to do that didn't work either, as the particular red basket he had tried that method on came alive and began eating his stick.

Harry hastily dropped them and the basket swallowed it like a spaghetti noodle and waddled away, settled and belched a cloud of saw dust.

Finding a nearby bolder (and after examining it to make sure that wasn't going to come alive and bite him in the arse) Harry sat down and considered the field of hundreds of innocent looking baskets.

He couldn't pick one of these things up, since it would likely take his arm off in the process, nor could he use a stick or other similar object to carry it as it would just meet the same fate.

He couldn't find one and just kick it across the distance (the basket was likely to take his foot off) and he couldn't levitate it since the door had been specific that he had to carry it across the threshold somehow, and he was not looking to aggravate whatever powers that be governed this place if they thought levitation was cheating, they might also take exception to being singed either.

Still, there must be at least one basket that he could handle; after all, the door said a "particular basket", so that means there must be at least one benign one in the whole lot. Harry patted himself on the back for realizing that.

As he tried to figure out what to do, he idly threw clumps of dirt and grass at nearby baskets, watching them come alive and eat the offerings before scuttling away.

He had an idea then.

It was true that he couldn't just try out every single one of them one at a time, since there were just too many, and they moved after they ate, making the job much harder, but what if he fed them all at once?

He slapped his fist into his hands. Yes, it just might work!

Nodding to himself he considered how he was going to do that.

Then he had another idea.

He began etching a clear ring, occasionally shooing baskets away with handfuls of grass or pebbles, until he had a large area marked out in the dirt.

Harry tossed aside the sharp rock had found and enlarged enough to use as a tool and took to the air until he was hovering over it.

Nodding to himself, he concentrated.
The area within the circle glowed and suddenly a large bubble lifted into the air hovering like a hot air balloon half filled with dirt and plant matter.

Harry concentrated and another one appeared then another and another until what passed for a sun in this place was eclipsed by the floating dirt bubbles and there was a giant hole 50 feet deep or more.

Harry nodded to himself. He had enough now.

He hovered above the bubbles, sweat beading on his brow, and edged his focus to what he wanted next.

Each bubble began to vibrate heavily, knocking and shaking their cargo until it was nearly fine clods, and then when Harry was satisfied (after all he didn't want to crush the basket creatures under a large wad of dirt) released his cargo all at once.

A rain of dirt fell and Harry was treated to the sight of a wave of rainbow coloured wicker coming alive and going into an eating frenzy, scuttling here and there.

During the commotion, Harry spied one basket that didn't move at all.

It was the size of a bassinet and made of pine shoved between to boulders near by a dancing banana shaped basket.

Harry quickly swooped in and grabbed the basket victoriously and landed on the other end of the meadow. He frowned at the basket in his arms.

It was not small, but not to big either, looking quite ordinary but for the odd addition of what he could only guess was some sort of wicker made harness.

Shrugging he stuffed the lot under his arm and stepped up to the door in the arch that had appeared before him (3).

The plaque appeared and began writing.

*Congratulations on conquering the first, and easiest of your trials. This trial has proven that you do not take appearances at face value. You're not a complete moron it seems after all.*

Harry snorted.

*For your second trial, you will need to wear the basket you carry.*

The door paused there and it seemed to wait until Harry put on the basket, which he did hastily, finding that it rested against his chest snugly, though he wasn't keen on it when the straps magically adjusted to his torso and seamlessly locked him in.

*Within this basket you will carry a precious treasure, the greatest wealth one can find on the planet. What that is, I will not tell you, it is what you decide.*

With that, the door slid open and Harry entered another cavern. This one though was relatively small and barren but for three pedestals in the centre.

On the pedestal to the right, was a thick rolled up scroll, on the centre was a dazzling ruby the size of his fist, and on the third was a melon sized porcelain coloured egg with veins of blue.

Harry looked around the room wearily, and then looked at his options.
After the hoopla with the ravenous baskets, this was rather anti-climactic, but at the same time, the quiet room held its own sinister quality in that Harry was sure that there was only one right choice, and if he chose wrong, he would likely suffer the consequences.

Harry's stomach suddenly growled.

It had been awhile since he ate and since he didn't seem to be on some sort of clock, and the room seemed otherwise harmless, he reached into his pack and pulled out a bottle of water and a sandwich, munching contentedly as he eyed his options.

He had read enough stories by now to know that going after things like giant rubies, gold and such was never a good idea. There was always a moral element in the situations like this that Harry had read in his books and he considered some of the stories he had come across involving mystical choices.

Like the Greek tale of a woodcutter that lost his axe in a river, and since it was his only means of livelihood, bewailed his poor luck, which caught the attention of the god Hermes who retrieved for him first a gold axe, then a silver axe the finally his original axe asking him if each axe was the one he lost. The Woodcutter smartly and honestly claimed only his own and Hermes gave him the first two as an award. Another fellow heard about this, and tossed his own axe into the water, cried and attracted Hermes. Unlike the more honest fellow, this one lied and claimed the gold axe was his, which resulted in unfortunate consequences for him (4).

Harry eyed the ruby wearily.

Yes, he was quite weary of choosing the most expensive item up for grabs, so he discarded it.

That left him with a choice between the scroll and the egg.

By this point he had surmised that each object must symbolize a particular type of wealth.

The ruby must represent material wealth.

So then what did the last two represent?

Harry eyed the scroll. It looked very old but in reasonably good condition.

He was reminded in various stories that many of the heroes were either aided by some sort of wise figure in some form or manner and through that help gained something, or occasionally were figures themselves that outwitted some antagonist or other through smarts not brawn.

The idea of brain over brawn, the pen is mightier than the sword and so on, were all things fluent in many of the things Harry had both read and heard through cultural interactions in his travels. He would not be stupid and say that that he didn't know what the scroll represented.

Knowledge is power and having a wealth of it makes you top dog. Even people like the Dursleys understood that (as there closed-mindedness allowed anyway).

That left the egg though.

He frowned as he eyed the egg.

It didn't take him to long to figure out what it represented.

New life.
Having life was the ultimate wealth of all. Where would your material wealth be without a living person to appreciate it? Where would knowledge be without a living person to discover it?

Harry nodded to himself as he slapped his hands free of crumbs, neatly packed away his sandwich box and strode over to the pedestal.

It was a no brainer really; the greatest wealth one can find on the planet is life.

He picked up the egg, freezing a moment, as if waiting for a giant boulder to bear down on him, then relaxed when nothing happened.

He carefully moved the somewhat heavy egg into the basket which suddenly lined itself with plush red velvet and feather down, and sealed the lid over it.

He grunted under the weight, but after few experimental strolls got the feel for it and made his way to the waiting red door.

The door greeted him snarkily.

*Well, another easy trial is down, though I doubt you will be as lucky in some of the others.*

Harry glowered at the door, as it continued to write.

*Congratulations on proving that you understand what real value is. The next task will not be so easy.*

Harry sighed, "Of course not."

*Beyond me lie those who despise the figure of a whole human. If you have two legs, two arms, two eyes, one nose, one mouth and one head then you cannot pass through without dying.*

With that the door swung open.

Harry wearily stepped forward.

He was in a large sitting room. A large giant's sitting room by the looks of it.

3 large sitting chairs were three giant humanoid creatures.

Each of these figures had fifty heads and a hundred arms, and judging by the waste basket nearby where he stood, which held the dusty bones of those who had tried for it and had not been able to pass, he would need to think of something quick to avoid the same fate.

Harry spotted a regular human sized axe and a chopping block. He didn't need help to figure out what that was for.

As the door said, he could not pass with his current features. He should probably consider himself lucky that they were taking a kip.

Harry huffed silently to himself 'well, I'm certainly not lopping off something.'

Then he remembered a little item he had taken from the Vault.

After some hunting, he pulled out what he was after.

The Nomkey Brand.
He took a breath as he stared at the cold seeming business end of the brand.

He had been curious at first, even tempted, to use it sometimes but after a while he finally determined that it would be too much of a bother to keep hiding from people, as he was sure that having a tail would stir up Normals if discovered. Now though, it was either an extra limb, or minus one.

Nodding to himself, he took off his pants and knickers, still keeping an eye on the giant creatures wearily.

Before he got to business he used a pair of scissors to cut a hole in the back of his trousers and knickers and then nodded to himself and picked up the brand.

From what he understood from the description, he would not need to heat it up; it apparently had all the necessaries built into it magically.

He carefully felt along his lower back until he found a space just above the crack of his arse and with a bracing breath, he pressed the brand down on the spot.

It hurt of course. it was a horrible burning agony that made him gasp before he bit his lip to strangle back the screams as he quickly ripped of the brand which surprisingly disintegrated in his hand. Apparently it was only for single use.

Growing the tail was no picnic either and left Harry panting like a race horse in the end.

This of course roused the three giants.

"Wha…?" the blondish one mumbled, blinking 50 sets of eyes open, a few hands scratching at a few noses, "What was that?"

His heads looked around sluggishly, his mutterings waking the other two.

A brunet one yawned fifty of his hands covering fifty mouths politely, "what are you on about Cottus? You woke me from a rather good nap, it's only been a few centuries after all."

"Well something woke me up Briareos," Cottus mumbled, heads still swivelling.

Briareos grumbled again but obligingly swung a few heads in a half-hearted effort.

Harry quickly, achingly pulled on his pants, shoving his tail in the holes he had made, not taking the time to really look at it he froze when the blond crowed, "there he is!"

A tidal wave of giant meaty hands grasped for him. Harry felt he may have lost a few years off his life in that moment seeing that sight descend on him.

He was grasped and lifted high into the air, tangling from his shirt.

Harry was treated to the most thorough and unnerving examination of his life as they eyeballed him.

"You idiot, Cottus, this is just some little creature crawly that somehow ended up in here. We can't even eat it, its scrawnier than anything else that's passed through ,and we have no idea where it's been, drop it and go back to sleep."

Cottus muttered sulkily and Harry was unceremoniously tossed the rest of the way across the room, where he caught himself, amazingly, on a nearby giant goat rack.

He watched, upside down and dangling from his new tail, which smarted at the abuse so soon after
growing, the giants settled back in there chairs, the third having never woken up at all and snoring contentedly.

He scrambled and slid down the coat rack and tottered his way to the red door shakily, checking the egg as he went, finding it miraculously undamaged.

_I was going to say you demonstrated something else, if you had actually did what normal heroes would have done, which was either loped off a limb or hidden an eye behind an eye patch or something, but you had to go and grow yourself a tail._

Harry flushed. He hadn't thought about something like an eye patch.

_Well, other than proving that there is benefits in keeping ones options open and pack rats do win out in the end, let's move on._

_Your next task shall have no clues, good look smart ass._

With that, the door slammed open and Harry, grumbling his own choice expletives, stalked through.

He halted as he entered some sort of grassy bower circled in white morning glories with a simple bench in the center on which a woman in a red flowing dress and russet curls was idly playing a lute.

"Well, aren't you are darling one?" the woman cooed as she beaconed him forward. Harry wearily approached, halting a few feet away. He was weary of anything at this point.

She tsked softly, "poor thing, just barely a babe, so young to be on such an arduous task."

Harry shrugged, politeness keeping him rooted to the spot for a moment since she didn't outright threaten him in some sort of manner.

"I've been around the block a few times," he mumbled, blushing when the woman smiled at him charmingly.

"Yes, that is not surprising; considering by the time that someone reaches my room they have known a great trial indeed, though you are the youngest to ever grace my bower."

He shifted uncomfortably.

She sighed, plucking an errant tune on her lute.

"To business then, more the pity with such fine youthful company, but needs must." She nodded to the red door lying in wait to her left framed in her flowered vines, "there lies the door to your final challenge. The door within that chamber will lead to your freedom from this place."

Harry was a little non-plused. That was…refreshingly informative.

"You may enter it at any time you wish; neither I, nor anything else in this place will stop you."

She sighed, plucking disconsolately on her lute.

Harry took one step towards the door, and then paused, turning to look back on the woman. She quickly hid her face in her hair, but he caught the look of naked longing and loneliness directed his way.

He took another step towards the door then halted at the little sigh.
"Um Miss," Harry finally gave into his twinge of conscience, and returned to stand in front of the woman, "if this seems to nosey don't bother answering, but why exactly are you upset?"

"I was once as free as you were," the woman sighed, "my name is Rosamund. (7) I was the daughter of a modestly prosperous merchant and my mother was a fine maker of quality hats…" Harry sensed a long story in the offing, so he took a seat across form her and listened.

"…I was their only daughter, my mother unable to carry any more children after myself, thus my father didn't have anyone else to pass along the family business to."

Judging by her attire that was during a time when the genders were decidedly one sided, Harry surmised.

"Father had a business partner and the man had 3 sons of his own. The two arranged for my marriage to the second eldest son, to merge their families and business and thus increase their prosperity. Unfortunately for them, during the betrothal party, a year before we were to be married, I met the servant boy of the second son. His name was Evander."

She sighed dreamily, sadly, bitterly.

Despite himself, Harry found himself leaning forward, fascinated by the unfolding tale.

"Defying convention, we soon fell in love and a month before my marriage, we gave into our urges and coupled together in a secluded part of mother's garden," she gestured around her, "in a garden much like this one. Unfortunately, my mother, who was of a strong opinion about family duty and social convention, spied our embrace.

Outraged she grabbed a scythe from the garden shed and descended upon my lover while we were in a post-coital daze. She massacred him while he was still atop me and dragged me inside afterwards.

After bathing she dragged me by my hair before my father and told him what I had done.

My father punished me severely and my father was honour bound to explain to my betrothed what had happened.

The wedding was called off, and I was banished to a convent soon after. My father named a distant cousin his heir instead and I never spoke to my parents again.

During the trip to the convent, my carriage broke down and I ventured away to attend to personal needs. When I emerged from the bushes, there was an old crone weaving by a willow tree. She beaconed me forth and asked me to hold her spool of wool.

Understand that I was still distraught and in shock after everything that had happened, and I was near mad with grief so when she handed me the spool, it tore at the gloves of my hands, then soon at the skin, scratching me horribly, she was knitting with brambles you see, but I did not drop it, I did not complain or cry or ask her to stop. I felt I deserved the pain. My lover had gotten killed because he had chosen to love me and with him gone, the pain was worse than the bramble spool.

When she was done, she revealed herself to be a fairy. She felt compassion and pity for my plight and gave me a choice."

Harry felt himself reaching into his bag and handed her one of his clean terry cloths.

"Thank you," she delicately dabbed at her eyes and face, sniffing.
"She offered me eternity in a place where I would know no more pain, and the chance to know valiant good hearted souls, the touch of passion, even if it were not my lover, she said that if I did, the child I had hoped for all my life would one day be born by one of my visitors.

She sighed, "the second choice was revenge upon my mother for killing my lover, and the third was giving up the child that was already growing in my belly when I entered the convent, as a nun cannot rear children of her own, being promised to God's service."

Harry suddenly realized that the woman had a slight swell to her tummy, a baby bump.

Seeing his glance she gave him a slight smile, resting a hand over her stomach.

"I had no wish to give up what remained of my lover, nor did I wish my mother harm despite what she had done. I chose the first option and from one blink to another, I was transported here. Here is where I have remained for a time so long that I have long lost the notion of its passage. The only thing that relieves the eternity is the small handful of suitors that make their way to me, and only a small portion of them were capable of quickening my child, but they have all failed."

Harry understood then why she was letting him go. He was too young to give her what she needed. He felt his face flush crimson causing he woman to chuckle, despite her melancholy.

Despite the rather awkward reasons, it relieved him to hear the bit of mirth.

He didn't cast another glance at the door for a long time as he decided to tell the lonely woman stories that he had heard and read and about his own travels. He felt he owed her at least that much, some company at least, after relating her story to him.

She seemed to enjoy the conversation, and the PBJ sandwiches he shared with her. She played him her lute, told him about her time growing up, about her later suitors, one of which was a robust amazon that had shown her the first delights of another woman's flesh and her realization that she enjoyed the bodies of both…then laughed at Harry's red face.

Soon though, their conversation began to putter down and they were left with nothing more to say to each other.

Harry regretfully stood up and said his goodbyes.

"Wait," she grabbed his sleeve, "please, stay with me. Your but a child, what awaits you beyond that door is sure death! I…can be your mother and we can remain here in company together….

Harry sighed, gently unlatching her fingers from his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, feeling horrible when her face fell, "I can't, I…I need something beyond this eternal place. I'm sorry…"

If he had still been the boy he was when at the Dursley's he would have agreed without a blink, he had wanted nothing more than a real family once, but he had been too long on his own, and was used to freedom.

The woman's face crumpled and she sobbed softly, hands over her face.

Harry was nearly at the door when he heard her whisper "please, I am so alone…"

Harry felt like he was swallowing nails, but he clinched his fist. He couldn't stay, he knew that, but he couldn't just leave her like this, she had been the only nice thing in this place.
He whirled around intending to apologize again, when he felt the shifting weight of the egg attached to his chest.

He looked down, then back and the woman then down at the egg again.

He had no idea what type of egg it was, but he had upon occasion felt the shifting of something moving around inside it, so he was reasonably sure whatever it was is alive at least.

He looked back at the door.

He was unsure if he would need it or not once he got to the other side, chances were highly likely…but...

He sighed and walked back to the crying woman.

She stopped, looking up at him as he unloosed the straps, which had magically released him when he had made his decision, opening the top of the basket and pulled out the egg, grunting slightly at the weight, had the thing gotten bigger?

"Here," he said laying the egg in her lap.

Rosamund instinctively pulled the egg close on her lap to keep it from falling.

"If I am likely to die like you said, I might as well leave this with someone who would appreciate it..." he rubbed the back of his head awkwardly, "I'm not sure what it is exactly…"

His fumbling was cut off by a loud sharp crack as the egg suddenly cracked cleanly in two.

The woman gasped in shock when a squalling human baby was revealed.

The woman gathered the baby into her arms, looking stunned.

It was a baby girl with beautiful dark caramel colored skin, a tuft of coppery curls, and bright vermillion eyes that stared up at the woman curiously.

"I...its..."

Speechless her hand suddenly flew to her belly, and Harry was stunned to realize that her stomach was now flatter than it had been before.

"All this time...the crone was right...oh!" she lunged forward and grabbed Harry in a bear hug, being careful of her new daughter of course, "Thank you! Thank you!"

Harry squirmed out of her hold, blushing and nodded, before turning back to the door.

The woman didn't try to stop him this time. She was too engrossed in the infant in her arms.

Well, that was eventful, should a cigar be waiting for on the other side little daddy?

Harry flushed and flipped the door off.

If the door had been able to, he was sure the red plank of wood would be laughing at him.

"Let's get on with it then!" Harry growled.

So impatient to die are you? Well, no matter, it's your funeral. For this last trial you are required to
give a gift. Whatever it may be, it must be given or suffer the consequences. Everything you need can be found in the room.

With that, Harry stepped into darkness.

Ooo ooo ooo

The final trial was in a large bowl-like room made entirely of dark marble so polished he could see himself in the floor and wall.

Crouched in the centre was the most frightening creature he had ever encountered yet.

It was a giant three headed winged dragon-snake. Each head had six pairs of eyes and three fangs respectively and the huge dark serrated wings he was sure would have blotted out the sun over an entire town of modest size had they been anywhere else (8).

"Well, it has been a long time since I have been graced with a visitor. Very few make it this far you understand."

The voice was odd, like it was coming from three different shaped vocal chords, so it sounded almost musical.

"Um…thanks?" Harry squeaked. Something very deep and visceral, something that spoke to the most primitive parts of him was quaking and telling him to turn around, turn around now!

Harry grit his teeth and pushed forward through his near mindless terror and took a shaky step forward, his tail curled around his leg.

A chuckle that made Harry long to slice off his ears filled the chamber.

"Such a brave child," the creature mused, settling itself more comfortably, "you are my youngest visitor, and one of only two who did not immediately pass out upon gazing upon me. Well, on to business then. First, do you know who I am?"

Harry took a moment to work through his fear and take in the creature again and trying to apply him to anything he had read about.

He shook his head when he drew a blank.

"I thought not," the creature hummed, "then introductions are in order. The Zoroastrians called me Azi Dahaka, I am Pain" the head to the left bowed, saying pain in a singular higher pitched voice, then the middle head bowed, "Agony," in a raspy singular voice, "Death" rattled another voice as the right head bowed.

"I was imprisoned by the hero of the time called Atta; I tried to overthrow a fellow by the name of Yima and now I am the obsolete destroyer of humanity excetra, excetra. What happened or will happen doesn't matter, time doesn't matter really, let's get on with my present."

"Present?" Harry squeeked.

"Mmm…yesss indeed!"

It wriggled eagerly.

"I'm sure the door explained to you that I will ask you for gifts?"
Harry nodded.

"And you are aware that if you are unable to give me even one of these, you shall never again see the light of day?"

Harry quaked but nodded again.

"Well, then, let's get on with it," Azi Dahaka lowered all three of its heads until Harry was level with nostrils twice the size of his torso, "I am a vain character. Pain, Agony, and Death are distinctly selfish experiences. Because of this, I crave the appeal to these. My tribute, should you even be able to manage it, is a moment of synchronous pain, agony, and death."

The creature was silent after that, as Harry goggled at the creature.

This was why both Rosamund and the door had said he would likely die. How was a bloke supposed to feel pain, emotional agony, and die at the same time? Whether he succeeded or not, he was still dead!

He was just about to panic when he caught his reflection in the floor again, in the walls, in the creature's eyes and its shiny scales.

Then he remembered the door's clue.

Everything he needed to survive was already in the room...his reflection! Him, he was all he needed! Aha!

"Alright" Harry said slowly and he began talking, fixing his mind on one incident that he thought might do, "when I was 7 years old, my uncle told me that if I did all my chores, was especially good and quiet and didn't cry or complain or otherwise be freakish, I would get a present for Christmas. I did what they asked. I never complained when I was left in my cupboard for days at a time without food, I never cried when Dudley and his friends hit me, I was quiet, respectful and did everything put before me and accepted punishments when they were given without a word."

"I was happy and excited when Christmas rolled around and uncle didn't send me to the cupboard right away. And there under the tree was a present wrapped up in Christmas paper for me. It had my name on it, I was so happy. "

Harry grimaced, rubbing his arm, he didn't like thinking back on the memory, but if he was to survive he had to speak about it.

"I opened my present to find a broken coat hanger."

Harry swallowed heavily, "my uncle told me that I should be grateful for that, he said that it was all I was worth getting."

"Interesting," the creature purred, "but how does an unworthy gift to yourself beget a worthy gift to me?"

Another hard swallow and Harry elaborated.

"The pain came from the hurt of my uncle's words caused me, and the remembrance of all the physical pain I had to endure to please him. The agony came from the realization that after everything I had done, the years of trying so hard to fit in, to be normal," he spat he word with disdain, "that it was all pointless, that was the most agonizing experience of my life."
"Hmmm..." the head that represented pain hissed, "yes that is pain," then the head that was agony rasped "yes that is agony."

Then third head rattled, "two met, but where is death in this tale?"

Harry turned his eyes fiercely on the six eyes of the right head.

"Death was to hope," he snarled, "in that moment any hope that I had nurtured, small as it was, that they would love me, accept me, that I would be a part of their family died in that moment. Afterwards, I had no illusions about my place within that house, and when I realized that I was an Abnormal, that I really was different from them, and I had the power to, I left, and never looked back. There is your death."

"Yes that is a death," the third head agreed, then all three heads spoke again, "clever little thing to know that death is not always the ending of the physical..."

"...But merely an end." Harry finished, "if there is one thing I understand in its intimacy, is that."

The creature purred delightedly, licking its lips as if savouring a rare treat, "I am pleased with this gift you may carry on."

With that the creature curled up into a giant ball and promptly went to sleep.

Shaking, Harry stumbled over to the red door.

Well, against all odds, you made it. Your trials are over.

Harry let out a relieved breath.

When you venture through this door you will find yourself back in the world that you left, though not in the same location. One can never return whence they came after all.

With that, the door flew open and Harry was sucked inside.

Chapter End Notes

1. The Snarky Door was something I made up, but wouldn't be surprised if there were ones like it in folklore, fantasy or mythos somewhere, 2. The Basket Monster is from Zulu mythos. It was said to be a creature that looked like an ordinary basket but could come to life when something was put into it and scuttle away. There was a story of a woman who placed her baby in one while working and it made off with her baby, never to be seen again, 3. I like to think of the arches that the Snarky Door uses to appear in to be like the holodeck arch from Star Trek TNG, 4. The story is from Greek mythology and has had retellings in other mythos, 5. Cookies to anyone who can name the movie Harry watched to get that idea, 6. From Greek mythology, these were 3 many headed/handed brothers that were the children of Gaia and later imprisoned after one of the great wars waged between the gods and the Titans, 7. Rosamund is based on a painting that I saw once. It was painted by William Bell Scott, a Pre-Raphaelite artist born 1811 - died 1890 and was called "Fair Rosamund in her Bower." Her story I made up for the fic and a link to the image can be found in my profile, 8. Azi Dahaka is a great cosmic serpent or dragon in Zoroastrian mythos that it respectively represented
anguish, pain and death. It is said that he conspired to overthrow the first human, Yima in this case, and was chained under a mountain, though it is said that he will one day break free and lay waste to the world.
March 19, Harry 10 years old, Crimea...

Harry had awoken on the top of a cliff in an area he would later learn was a range of mountains running parallel to the south-east coast of Crimea in the country of Ukraine of all places and that it had been around a month...a month since he had gotten sucked under the waves and then cragged in and spat out from yet another Hidden Place. He had come out on the western half of the range where it dips into the black sea, and Harry was never gladder to take in the stark dark blue of the water from landside view.

He spent time walking, flying and generally lingering around the shores or of the Black Sea, taking the time to recover from his ordeal.

Harry eventually wandered into populated areas of course and he spent his time observing circumspectly, absorbing the new atmosphere.

The first place he ended up was the Yalta City Municipality, a resort region with a modest population, located at the southern shore of Crimea – and apparently one of the one of the most famous recreational territories of the former Soviet Union in its time.

It had 21 towns and 9 villages in the region, but while Harry wandered through a fair few, he spent the most time in Nikitsky Botanical Garden slinking through the beautiful flora for a time, reading books that he had gathered from a gift shop, and a library; feeling fortunate to have found something in his native tongue.

Eventually he moved on when security guards became suspicious.

Harry wandered further into Ukraine and spent time sketching things that he saw, like great white pelicans that were native to south west Ukraine, an annoyed speckled ground squirrel native of the east Ukrainian steppes that glared at him a lot, and more scenic pictures like Lake Synevir, the largest lake in the Ukrainian Carpathians (1).

Natural scenery wasn't the only thing that he sketched.

Harry snuck one evening into the session chamber of the Verkhovna Rada, the Parliament of Ukraine, when no one was around, and hovered above the property of the home of the president of Ukraine among other places enjoying a leisurely draw before security spotted his fleeting shadow and he had to skedaddle quickly.

He did other things during his two months in Ukraine:

He avoided being taken out by an Antonov An-225 Mriya and its huge wings while flying in some unexpected overcast clouds, and thus subjected to another of one of the numerous near heart attacks that Harry had experienced in his short life span (2).

He was also lucky enough to stumble across a launch site where he watched a rocket launch a self-made satellite and sparked his interest in astronomy for a time, books of this nature joining Harry's shrunken library.
Being the ambling wandering tourist that he was he didn't miss out on visiting some of the more tourist friendly places such as mountain ranges suitable for skiing, hiking and fishing. He even sneaked into a class catering to the kids of tourists and got a chance to learn how to ski, an awkward, yet fun experience.

He also learned other fun physical activities like learning to dance the Hopak from watching local dancers, which was even funner then skiing in his opinion and was especially enjoyable when he tried to incorporate some of the dance moves while flying, sometimes with embarrassing results, but all in good fun (3).

He snuck into concerts and listened to Ukrainian pop and folk music from performers like Vopli Vidoplyasova, Dakh Daughters, Ivan Dorn and Okean Elzy. And found himself humming tunes for weeks afterwards. (4)

When Ukraine was influenced by the Soviet Union there was an increased emphasis on physical education. Because of these, it left Ukraine with hundreds of stadia, swimming pools, gymnasia and many other athletic facilities. Harry was able to use some of his earnings from his work selling pictures to tourists and actually enter a few of them and enjoy the environment without sneaking around. The most popular sport is football, though, and Harry remembered how much he enjoyed the games he watched in some of the other countries he had visited and made sure to take time to watch some games, cheering and booing with the fans (5).

He wasn't just aimlessly wandering though (all though he was doing that) he had continued in his personal education in the realm of food.

Like many of the other countries that Harry had visited over the years, Ukraine had a rich and diverse cuisine heritage. The traditional Ukrainian diet of meats was usually chicken, pork, beef, fish and mushrooms, the latter of which Harry expanded his knowledge with mushrooms and learned of a wider variety of species that were edible and many of the recipes attached to them, which was a lot in Ukraine. Ukrainians also tend to eat a lot of potatoes, grains, fresh, boiled or pickled vegetables. Popular traditional dishes include varenyky (boiled dumplings with mushrooms, potatoes, sauerkraut, cottage cheese, cherries or berries), nalysnyky (pancakes) with cottage cheese, poppy seeds, mushrooms, caviar or meat), kapuśniak (soup made with meat, potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage, millet, tomato paste, spices and fresh herbs), and borsch (soup made of beets, cabbage and mushrooms or meat), holubtsy (stuffed cabbage rolls filled with rice, carrots, onion and minced meat) and pierogi (dumplings filled with boiled potatoes and cheese or meat) which was one of the first dishes that Harry both ate and learned to cook by observing a clueless family through their home window one early evening. (6)

Harry even acquired his first bottle and taste of alcohol for the first time when a rather drunken individual smelling strongly of cigars and his previous evening's liquid dietary adventures, stumbled into Harry while he was wandering down a street in Kiev.

"I am the luckiest man in the world!" the man hic-coughed, then shoved a bottle of something into Harry's hands, "here! drink! Enjoy! On me! ooo weeee!"

Harry had chuckled and looked at his unexpected boon. A local beverage called Horika (7). It certainly would have put hair on his chest (if Harry were still capable of it) when he tried a sip out of curiously. It burned like the pit of hell, making him cough.

He still stored the bottle in his pack though. You never know when a bottle of the good stuff would come in handy.

He did enjoy another, decidedly less alcoholic beverage called Kefir, which tasted sort of like yogurt
nad was one of his favorite drinks of Ukraine.

He eventually began to leave Ukraine, seeking a more temperate climate then heading further north into Russia, despite his curiosity about the place, so instead of going North he veered towards Turkey and save Russia for another visit.

Ooo ooo ooo

April 2, Istanbul...

Harry hummed contentedly as he gnawed on a pastry as he dangled from the point of one of the sharply inclined towers of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, a museum that was once a place of worship (8).

Harry bobbed his head to a popular local tune he had picked up and was playing on his portable player.

He looked up at his tail fondly. Despite the fact that it could be a trial at times, and he was certainly not going to be naked around any potential witnesses anytime soon, he found that if he wrapped his tail around his waist and wore a long enough shirt, it just looked like he wore a silky black furred belt.

He enjoyed hanging from his tail, and found the extra appendage when he was climbing around in forests, mountains and setting up camp to be handy.

His attention was caught when a figure waved at him from the point of another tower nearby.

"Oh!" he hummed, turning off his music and releasing his tail, allowed himself to slip into the embrace of gravity for a few seconds before swooping upwards lazily and perching beside the other figure.

"Hello me," he greeted.

"Hello me" the other greeted back.

With a nod the two separate seeming but identical boys grabbed each other's hands and melded back into Harry (9).

Harry took a moment to assimilate the information.

One part of him had spent the day hanging from various buildings and visiting historical sites in Istanbul while the other him had gone to peek in at restaurants and acquire the odd reference book in English.

*Other Harry's Memories…*

Harry had been scoping out a Esnaf lokantası (a restaurant for shopkeepers and tradesmen) when he had overheard a conversation between two gruff individuals near by the window where he had been scoping for a vantage point through the kitchen window.

"It's a travesty I tell you! I and those like me getting our pay docked 12 galleons, 12! Just because some wandering tourists and a few co-workers disappear and they have to hire some fancy curse breaker all the way from Serbia!"

"That far?" the second man whistled, "Though people disappearing instead of being sent wandering
off all confused or let in is a bit of a serious matter I suppose…”

The first man waved his hand dismissively, "what does that matter? They will turn up eventually; I don’t see why our pay has to be cut so drastically! I'm not even a handler even! I'm just administrative!"

The other man tsked in sympathy.

"It's bad enough that the fool barrier is broken, and the pay is horrible, but I am forced to eat and dress like a common muggle! I am a Pureblood! I deserve better than this!"

"I had wondered why you invited me out for dinner here when I came for my visit." The second clucked into his Turkish coffee as he took a genteel sip.

"Yes, well, the food isn't bad for muggle fair," the man grumbled reluctantly, "and the exchange rate into muggle money means I can, just barely, afford to wait for those incompetents to sort out the issue of the barrier so I can go back to work."

"I commend your sense of thrift," the second raised his cup before taking another sip, "it's things like this that make me glad I went into independent business."

The first snorted, "you…ahem, acquire objects of interest my friend, and sell them to the highest bidder for whatever you ask. I do envy your independence from lack wits my friend."

"Hmmm…yes, though I get my fair share of customers who are lacking in grey matter as well I'm afraid from time to time. Idiocy appears to be a universal malignancy I'm afraid."

The first chortled, raising his cup, "then let us toast the fools and be glad that we are not them."

"Agreed!"

The two clanked cups and dug into their rice and vegetable stew and talk dissolved into chatter about the rash of fevers lately.

Harry perched himself on the roof of the Esnaf lokantası and contemplated what he had overheard.

Granted, he didn't understand much of what was said, but he did pick up a few things, words that had sounded like some of the things that Rhubarb had prattled about, he remembered the term "muggle".

It seemed he had stumbled across another set of Abnormals, these ones were decidedly less intimidating then some of the creatures, deities, and monsters he had seen so far.

Unfortunately for Harry, when he tried to follow the two men after they left, they literally disappeared into thin air with only a loud pop each to announce their departure.

Grumbling to himself, he had floated from roof top to roof top idly, no longer interested in food viewing, deep in thought when he nearly collided with another figure who happened to be floating over the roof tops.

Both of them started and stared at each other.

The other floating figure was a woman dressed in flowing veils and was pale all over but for hints of color here and there, like something crafted out of translucent pearl.

There was a neigh, and Harry craned to the side, and spotted what must have been 20 horses in
various stages of over exhaustion or ill health, looking strangely content with floating in the air, standing on nothingness behind her in a loose train.

"Um..." Harry scratched the back of his head, "Sorry for nearly bumping into you?"

The woman cocked her head, her eyes, pits of swirling darkness and eyed him severely before blinking then shrugging.

"It is no matter to me. I suppose with my awakening, there was bound to be others traversing the skies, though I am uncertain as to what you are at the moment. Given this country is a trade nexus between Europe and Asia, we are bound to get some foreigner over flow."

"Er, yeah," Harry agreed vaguely. Another Abnormal in less than an hour, Other Harry was going to be assimilating a rather interesting evening indeed.

"Just so you know, I have claimed this territory, but only if you're interested in the unpunished guilty and those who mistreat their horses."

"Uh, not my thing really," he said hastily.

"Well then, so long, just pass along what I told you in case you some across anyone else who has awoken alright?"

Harry nodded, out to sea.

They separated and the strange flying woman who might or might not have also been a spirit of some kind, continued on her way (10).

After that, Harry continued on his way back to the museum where his other self was waiting to rejoin, confused but relieved that it had not lead to anything horrible. It was somewhat reassuring that encounters with other Abnormals weren't always life threatening, but could be completely mundane.

*End of Other Harry's memory*

Harry hummed thoughtfully as soon as the memories digested properly then took to the air as the sun began to peek over Istanbul's skyline.

"Well today was full," he mused to himself in the quiet early morning.

Harry decided not to remain in Turkey much longer. He had not seen the two men return to the restaurant, and he was not keen on tempting fate with that flying horse stealing spirit lady so he pulled out a map and began looking for another destination.

Ooo ooo ooo

April 10, Iran...

Harry passed through Iran with a keen eye, watching for anything unusual.

Other than the spots he had come to recognize as the odd Hidden Place here and there (inaccessible of course), he didn't spy anything unusual at first until he stopped for a kip inside the Nayban Wildlife refuge (11).

He decided to make it a half week stop over to replenish some supplies and feel a little ground beneath his feet.
He set up camp in a place as out of the way as he could find, enjoying cool sips of water as he read one of the books on Persian mythology he had scrounged up somewhere.

According to the book, the characters of Persian mythology almost always fall into one of two camps: They are either good, or they are evil (no surprise there, being a common theme in other tales from around the globe so far). The resultant discord mirrored the nationalistic ideals of the early Islamic era as well as the moral and ethical perceptions of the pre-Islamic period, in which the world was perceived to be locked in a battle between the destructive Ahriman (roughly meaning angry man and considered a destructive spirit of some kind) and his hordes of demonic Dews (some sort of false gods or supernatural unsavory formed beings) and their Un-Iranian supporters, versus the Creator Ormuzd, (higher divine spirit of the old Iranian religion predating Islam) who although not participating in the day-to-day affairs of mankind, was represented in the world by the Izads (part of divinity and collectively represent the good powers under Ohrmuzd) and the righteous Ahlav (those who walk the path of truth) (12).

Harry hummed in thought as he considered what he had read. Truthfully, he was curious about what would happen should he come across some sort of sacred being like Ohrmuzd. He reasoned if blokes that important were around, they would likely not care about Harry. He dismissed the section on the major players and turned his attention to another chapter, flipping through the book randomly to make his choice.

He was just about to read about some epic battle when the tree that Harry had been leaning against suddenly shuttered, then with a deep creek, bowed under the weight of something rather heavy and Harry's vision was filled with two large golden eyes.

Yelping, he skidded away, tail puffed out, from under the tree, "Bad Day! Bad Day!" patting his chest to keep his heart inside as he took in the supernatural amalgamation that was currently preening its feathers (13).

It was roughly the size of a man that looked like a peacock with the head of a dog and the claws of a lion.

After his brain felt comfortable with what he was seeing, he carefully pulled his book towards him and, since the creature seemed uninterested in attacking him for the moment, hastily flipped through the book (suspecting or hoping that it was local) until he came across a chapter with a similar illustration.

**Simurgh**

"…This fascinating creature from Persian myth is a benevolent, mythical flying creature…"

Harry relaxed a tad, that was somewhat reassuring, especially given the claws that were bigger than his head, though he didn't completely relax his guard. He could only take these tales with a grain of salt after all; they contained truths but were not truth themselves.

"…The simurgh is inherently benevolent and unambiguously female. Being part mammal, she suckles her young. The simurgh has teeth…," Harry eyed said teeth as it…she, yawned, "…It has an enmity towards snakes, and its natural habitat is a place with plenty of water…"

A place like this most likely, he just hoped the creature didn't have a thing against those who talked to snakes.

"…Iranian legends consider the bird so old that it had seen the destruction of the world three times over. The simurgh learned so much by living so long that it is thought to possess the knowledge of all
the ages. In one legend, the simurgh was said to live 1,700 years before plunging itself into flames…"

Harry whistled, impressed despite himself, though when he looked at the creature, he found it cleaning one of its copper coloured wings with a long tongue.

"…The simurgh was considered a purifier of the land and waters and bestow fertility…"

"Oh well, you're an important one then," he mused out loud. The Simurgh barked in agreement and set to work on her other wing.

He set the book closed and waited for the bird (?) to finish its ablutions.

After a while, Harry was lightly dozing when the creature nudged him gently with a narrow muzzle. It was actually quite beautiful in a way, once you got used to it.

"Right, it's nice to meet you and all, but since you're determined to settle in my campsite, I'll leave you to your business and…" His rambling was cut short when he felt himself flat on his back, the creature pinning him carefully with one of her alarmingly sharp looking feet.

He froze not daring to do anything in case he got sliced open.

Then the creature began nosing around its chest feathers and removed a golf ball sized seed, and with a delicate precise crunch, easily demolished it in her teeth.

Harry blinked as a wave of drool and seed juice rained on his face and directly into his eyes were his glasses had been flung away in the position change.

He blinked at the eyes and face full.

Then he yelped as his eyes became extremely warm, the world fuzzing out completely for a second then re-emerging with a clear crispness that made him gasp.

"I…I can see…I can see so clearly!" Harry exclaimed in surprise.

Huffing, the creature gave a woof of satisfaction and with that, let him up then flew off before Harry could properly thank her for whatever she did.

He wiped sticky fluid off his face and with his new vision, sat back down with his book in a hammock he had set up between two trees as tried to get some sleep, though sleep was long in coming.

Ooo ooo ooo

April 15, Turkmenistan… (14)

Harry had to admit that Turkmenistan had the most beautiful of the flags he had seen whipping in the breeze in all his travels. He learned, during his time there that the country had the most detailed national flag in the world. It had a green field with a vertical red stripe near the hoist side, containing five beautifully patterned carpet guls (designs used in producing rugs) stacked above two crossed olive branches, a white waxing crescent moon, and five white five-pointed stars appear in the upper corner of the field just to the fly side of the red stripe. (15)

He hummed and took a picture from where he was currently perched in the wee morning hours in Ashgabat.
He pocketed the camera and pulled out his map as he considered his route.

From what he could make out of the map he had acquired from a nearby hotel, the M37 was the main road to travel when in the country and seemed to stay vaguely to the outer areas of the country. He had decided to follow it for now as he headed in the general direction of Tajikistan before finally hitting China.

He nodded to himself and took to the air.

Ooo ooo ooo

April 17, Merv…(16)

Harry should have known that after a few weeks of relative calm that something was bound to happen to him at some point.

In this case it was as he was visiting Merv, a major oasis-city, located near Mary, that something of the more unusual variety was afoot.

First off, the timing of his arrival was a bit early. He knew it was likely that visiting tourists (not turned off by the rather strict visitor's visa), maintenance and the occasional archeologists would be around somewhere, but to his surprise, the entire place was completely deserted, even cars were left untouched in the blazing sun.

Harry landed wearily, eyeing his surroundings.

It was quiet. To quiet.

And then, as he ventured further in, he saw what had driven the people away.

It was a huge spring, and judging by its formation it was new. Not only that, but before Harry's eyes, he watched as great horses, the colour of the spring's foam, merged from the water and galloped off.

Thankfully, it was a rather benign encounter, as the Spring Horses (as he called them) didn't seem inclined to care about his presence.

Harry sketched a few of them, but after a time, he grew board of the spectacle, and flew off. (17)

Ooo ooo ooo

April 24, Uzbekistan…

His stay in Uzbekistan was relatively uneventful, barring the rather peeved Normal whom had caught Harry peeking in his window while he was cooking and threw a shoe with precision accuracy at Harry's head. The fact that the man was on the fifth floor of an apartment building also seemed to be a factor to his agitation. Harry fled quickly, nursing a bruise for his troubles.

Ooo ooo ooo

May 10, Tajikistan…(18)

In the mountainous landlocked sovereign country of Central Asia known as Tajikistan, he spent most of his time hiking through some of the most breath taking mountain scenery he had seen yet. He would sneak around camping locals during these hikes and listen to their songs and stories, and stole a rather nice looking red sweater from a Russian mountain climber.
He also tromped through rivers, water meadows, broad-leaved and juniper forests, mountain shrub land and sub-alpine meadows, taking pictures or sketching local wildlife and generally enjoying himself.

The only Abnormal problems he had during his hike was a when group of imps kept stealing any cheese or dairy products that he set aside while preparing his meals, they also shaved him bald in his sleep, but it grew back every single time and they eventually left off when it kept growing back the next day. Harry was never able to catch the wily pests. (19)

Ooo ooo ooo

May 12, boarder between Turkmenistan and China...

Harry was flying over a mountain range that that stood between Turkmenistan and China, the Sun low in the sky as twilight was falling and giving jagged peaks and pregnant shadows a fiery caress when something flew out from the hidden craggy crevices.

Harry sucked in a startled breath when he bore witness to what can only be a herd of winged stags and does. They had the tail, feathers, and wings of a giant raptor and the head, torso and legs of a deer. It had varying shades of white, cream, tan and grey feathers with bands of black and the eyes were large and closer together then what was normally found on a deer with swirling amber and dark blues.

The herd, or flock, however you called them, separated then began flying in pairs, circling each other, then separating. Sometimes they would linger for only a moment, and sometimes they would remain with a partner longer.

The longer that a pair flew tighter, the more complicated the flight, the more intertwined they became, and they would shoot upwards so high in to the sky that they were barely discernible to the naked eye.

Harry watched it all on a thin cliff edge, having taken cover when they began pouring outwards and felt that deep sense of awe at the beauty of these creatures that he was fairly certain were not of the more normal local fauna.

It was nice to be reminded that there was beauty and wonder in the Abnormal world as well at times (20).

Chapter End Notes

1,8, 11, 14, 16, 18. Information on this area, tourist sites and such and its local flora and fauna are From Wikipedia, 2. Actual air vehicle "is a strategic airliftcargo aircraft that was designed by the Soviet Union's Antonov Design Bureau in the 1980s. The An-225's name, Mriya (Мрiя) means "Dream" (Inspiration) in Ukrainian. It is powered by six turbofan engines and is the longest and heaviest airplane ever built, with a maximum takeoff weight of 640 tonnes." - Wikipedia, 3. Hopak is a Ukrainian dance that has been around since the 16th century and is commonly considered by some to by the Ukrainian national Dance, 4. Actual musical stars from this country. If you're interested, just look them up on youtube, 5. Information from Wikipedia, 6. From various websites, a cook book, and Wikipedia, 7. Local drink, quite a punch according to description, and cookies if anyone can remember why precisely Harry isn't capable of growing chest
hair, 9. Cookies to anyone who can identify what he used to accomplish this, 10. Al Basti, from Turkish folklore that has many variations, one of which is that she punishes guilty souls and taking horses that are mistreated or unable to work. She is also known as the Red Mother, 12. Information from random sites, books, and Wikipedia, 13. Cookies to anyone who gets the reference, 15. Refer to google image for flag, 17. Related to Turkmenistan folklore about horses, or a breed of horses that sprang from a spring, 19. Imps are a common creature in much folklore around the world, and are commonly considered similar to a fairy or a goblin. They are pranksters for the most part and are believed to be Germanic in origin, 20. The Peryton, from "The Book of Imaginary Beings" by Borges, said to be referenced in old medieval manuscripts.
The Boy and The Mountain.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

May 14, Harry is 10, China...

"Er...let's see...nǐ? No...no... its nǐ, yah, that's it!, nǐ zǎo, nǐ jiǎng yīng yǔ ma? Hah! Got it that time!," Harry fist pumped as he walked along a bare stretch of rock, his tail perked up and bobbing merrily (1).

China was a large country, a very large country, and the most populated one by Normals in the entire world. As such, Harry figured that he was going to be here for a while exploring, so he decided that the first thing he needed to do was find a nice quiet place out of the way and due a bit of language learning.

He chose a small valley located outside the westernmost city in China called Kashgar, located near the border with Tajikistan. (2)

Luckily for him, Kashgar had a few stores that offered some handy books in their hotels for tourists. Harry acquired himself a thick conversational Mandarin tome, Mandarin being spoken by about 70% of the population of China (3), figuring that it was a good gamble for possible understanding.

For the time that Harry was stationary in Kashgar for studying, it wasn't all work. Harry also snuck into the local movie theaters occasionally when he saw a movie poster outside one and it looked interesting. He quickly became utterly fascinated by the elaborate special effects, the costumes, the rich colours and textures of these films. He marveled at House of Flying Daggers, cheered on Detective Dee in Young Detective Dee, practice punches and kicks back in his camp later after seeing an exhausting number of Bruce Lee films, and laughed and cheered while he watched the films of Jackie Chan (The Drunken Master one of his favorites).

After a month of preparation, and a dubious experience with salty plums, he was finally ready to continue.

Ooo ooo ooo

June 14 the , Lhasa, China...

His stay in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa was relatively short, a few days or so. (4)

He hovered over the Roof of the Jokhang Temple; examined the Norbulingka monastery main gate and pondered going inside, he sketched the Potala Palace; and a Wheel of Dharma.

He enjoyed the Jokang Market, carving out his own little space to sell sketches, a few of the other vendors giving the foreigner boy amused looks and when he wasn't doing that, looking at the wares, humming appreciative into a lunch time rice ball.

When he wasn't in the market he entertained himself by sneaking in and watching cabaret acts, the performers singing in English, Chinese, Tibetan, and Nepali, and the dancers wearing traditional Tibetan costume with long flowing cloth extending from their arms, which interested him, rather liking the look.

After a few more days of selling sketches and generally absorbing his surroundings and seeing all
there was to see, he eventually said so long to Lhasa and took to the starlit sky.

Ooo ooo ooo

June 30 the , Jiuzhaigou Valley...

Jiuzhaigou Valley had to have been one of the more serenely beautiful places he had stayed in outside of his little bit of paradise back in France. Because a lot of the area is considered a wildlife preserve and a national park, there was a lot of unspoiled beauty that Harry could pick from and be out of the way of some of the populated areas. (5)

Harry found a nice little out of the way crevice and enlarged his birdhouse, tossing his things inside, but for a journal, taking the time to make an entry about his journey so far, and reminder notes about dressing more warmly for the higher altitude, and taking special note that China had a particularly busy sky, the various planes that had nearly beaned Harry along the way was mind boggling.

After that he grabbed his camera, pocketed extra film, and went shutter happy.

He took pictures of Five Flower Lake, marveling at its multitudes of jewel greens, blues, and turquoisees cradled like a multicolored gem in the steep lee of timbered hills.

He pulled out a fishing rod at Reed Lake, not catching even a nibble but sketched the russet coloured reed-covered marsh that had a clear turquoise brook that zig-zagged through it, and camped there overnight, gazing at the stars and taking pictures of their reflection in the water.

Unsurprisingly, it was also a popular tourist destination, and Harry had to occasionally dodge tourists and their guides, knowing very well that he would likely piss off some of the local authorities if he was found wandering through the protected area outside of the pathways reserved for the tourists.

At one point, Harry stumbled across a group who appeared to be rather stressed looking college students muttering about term papers. Why this caught his particular interest, he was unsure, so he decided to shadow them discreetly out of curiosity as they gathered samples, wrote on clipboards and generally did rather academic science things that Harry only partially got.

It was soon after the group left that Harry realized why it had caught his attention.

It had been so long since he had been in school, that it was almost jarring to be reminded that he was not only a primary school drop-out, but he was not likely to return to school and eventually mutter over his own term papers in college. After some thought, he came to the conclusion that he felt perfectly fine with that.

After that bit of soul searching he soon becoming bored and drifted off to explore some more.

The Town of Zhangzha at the exit of the valley and the nearby Songpan County had a number of hotels, including several luxury five-stars, such as a Sheraton. Harry amused himself by sneaking in and helping himself to the little shampoo and conditioner bottles, some towels to replace his rather grotty ones, and a rather nice housecoat that he acquired from a honeymoon suite to wear when he was in his birdhouse during bad weather.

He only felt slightly guilty when a housemaid screamed and fainted from the sight of these items dancing out a window (after all, the maid did fall on a nearby bed, so she wasn't hurt or anything).

He also worked the crowds outside the hotels and acquired himself some more of the local currency to buy some more blank journals as well as some handicrafts, snacks and souvenirs at Heye, Shuzheng and Zechawa along the main paths that cater to tourists.
The only thing of real concern during his time here was when he went to explore Guodu and Hejiao villages which are no longer populated, and had an encounter with a rather disturbing ghost of a little girl who kept appearing in random spots and covered in blood, clutching a plushy, and smiling creepily at him. (7)

She followed him around the entire village, and Harry was quick to vacate, and was relieved when she seemed confined to the village and didn't follow him.

Harry peeked in on endangered Pandas, had a staring contest with a Snub Nosed Monkey as they both hung precariously by their tails over some tempting fruit, daring each other to make the first move.

After about 4 days Harry had filled two sketchbooks and gone through 4 rolls of film, and barring the incident with the ghost, he considered it a good run and continued on his way.

Ooo ooo ooo

July 5th, Somewhere in the province of Qinghai...

Harry had been lost on his way to the province capital, cursing maps, when a sudden storm had driven him to hurriedly erect shelter in a small copse of trees and hunker down for the night.

When he awoke, it was to find the gateway entrance to a path towards a freakin' mountain fifty feet from his birdhouse door.

He stared, blinked, and pulled out his map, lowered it, the mountain was still there, and went back to the map but no matter how he looked at it and studied it, it still insisted that there should be a stretch of grassland in his general vicinity for miles, not a bloody mountain!.

The mountain itself was rather narrow for a mountain, but exceedingly tall, the peak disappearing into the clouds.

Harry cleared up camp, tossed his map disgustedly into his bag, and scratched his head, mentally calculating the best way to fly through this unexpected, but non worrisome obstacle. He could fly after all, and barring possible avalanches or something sinister of the unnatural variety, which still wasn't as prevalent as many thought, despite his experiences. After all, he was a danger in his own right.

He had the almighty penguin power on his side after all.

It was also a singular mountain, not a mountain range. He could easily fly around this.

The only problem he had was that he was uncertain precisely where he was. It was highly likely that the storm had confused his navigation somehow, or else there wouldn't be a mountain in front of him.

He supposed that he could just pick a direction and continue flying until he hit the next populated area…

Then his eyes got some movement in the distance, a woman who was huffing with a heavy looking basket dragging behind her.

Harry let out a relieved breath. Here was his chance to ask for proper directions, so he hurried up to the woman, and asked in halting Mandarin, "Excuse me, but I am lost, could you give me directions to the capital? Or even a bus stop?"
The woman, perhaps middle aged with lines in the corners of her eyes and mouth and a hardy look about her, dressed in a simple grey and white garments with her hair worn under a plain grey headscarf let go of her heavy basket. She leaned against it and regarded him.

"I don't know myself, as I tend to stay close to home, but" perhaps noting Harry's disappointed look she continued, "my mistress who lives at the peak of the mountain is quite knowledgeable, she would be able to provide you with directions."

Harry nodded and was about to walk off to find a secluded spot to take to the air, when he heard the grunts of effort the woman who had helped him was making as she renewed her toil. Harry, while being self-interested to a fair degree, was not unkind and had, from time to time, stopped in his meanderings to help someone if they needed it.

"Excuse me again, but I noticed that you're having some trouble, do you need help?"

The woman wiped the sweat from her brow and replied, "Are you sure? It's quite a journey; I don't want to keep a quick lad such as yourself from your own journey."

Harry shrugged, waving it off and took his position on the other side of the large basket. After all, it was contemporary China, what was the likely hood that there wasn't some elevator or cart or something somewhere further ahead to take them up the mountain? After all, lugging heavy baskets or whatever up a wicked tall mountain like this would just be plain…well, ridiculous.

"Thank you very much," the woman said giving a quick bow of thanks then produced a carrying pole from somewhere, making Harry blink in confusion, and ran it though the basket handles and handed Harry a cloth for his shoulder and the two heaved and lifted the basket and began walking.

Harry would be lying if he said he didn't apply a little Lift, enough to make it lighter, but not to the point of suspicion.

Harry's judgment of the path that led to the foot of the staircase at the base of the mountain was definitely misjudged, as it suddenly stretched out before him for what looked like two miles ahead, instead of the fifty feet.

He blinked again, rubbing his eyes.

As soon as he set foot passed the gate onto the white stone path, his eyes happened to look to the side and what had been plain grass on either side of the path at first glance had suddenly morphed into a river that circled the mountain like a moat.

"What?!" he gasped, "where did that come from?!" he exclaimed.

"What?" the woman asked from her position behind him.

"The River!"

"Rivers are quite normal," she replied simply.

Telling himself that it wasn't completely unlikely, he'd seen mirages a time or two while traveling after all, (though more of water then mirages of no water) so shrugging it off he plowed forward.

At first, it seemed a relatively calm crossing, but after only a few minutes of walking, the water on either side of the path immediately began frothing and churning and suddenly out of the water, to Harry's horror, leapt hundreds of long shining eels!
Harry yelped as some of them hit his head in passing, smarting enough to make his ears ring.

"What's with the eels?!" Harry hollered as he began to run, dodging, leaping and ducking, the woman keeping up with his movements (Harry being in the front).

"Eels are quite normal," she replied casually, not sounding perturbed or winded at all.

"Yeah, but like this?" he muttered under his breath. Still, he had seen flying fish; perhaps some breeds of eel did that as well? He wasn't an expert in eel after all, only on eating them.

The woman offered to turn back after another eel got his shoulder painfully.

Harry imagined the woman huffing and puffing with the basket through all this on her own, and how much worse it would be for her, and grit his teeth, shaking his head and increased his speed.

Finally they reached a roofed pavilion that was set one third of the way along the path, and Harry lay over the basket panting for breath.

The eel had stopped leaping out of the water as soon as they had entered.

They took a break there and the woman who was still not even out of breath and completely uninjured by the eels somehow, helped to treat his injuries with a strong smelling balm that she kept on her person.

Then they took up the basket again.

The second third of the journey though proved much more precarious…literally.

"A deep pit with jagged rocks?!" Harry exclaimed as he took a long, long, long look down.

"A treacherous drop is quite normal," the woman replied, unperturbed.

"But the path is only 2 feet wide now!" Harry pointed out.

"A narrow path is quite normal," the woman replied, still unperturbed.

Harry was sensing a broken record.

Harry eyed the path apprehensively, but pictures of the woman falling to her doom filled his brain, and the imagined screams of "if only someone had been with me to keep me from falling!" caused him to sigh in resignation and pulled forward.

As soon as they ventured no more than a few feet, a sudden strong wind began to blow, making the large basket between them sway, pulling them towards the edge.

Now, Harry knew good and well that he didn't really need to worry about the fall, he could fly and all, but the woman couldn't and if they fell he would be forced the reveal his powers to her, something he was certain wouldn't go over well.

It was with sweat beading on his brow, and intense focus to the loss of anything else as Harry kept making adjustments while Lifting to compensate for the wind which kept coming at them from different directions, something Harry was not sure was entirely possible, but he wasn't a scientist, so he couldn't be sure.

When they got to the second rest pavilion the woman prepared them some tea to help with Harry's headache and nerves, and Harry shared his fish stuffed buns.
When they were refreshed, Harry, still in the lead, peaked out onto the last third of the path. It looked relatively clear. He cast suspicious glances up, down, and either side.

Nothing but solid rocky terrain.

He licked his finger and held it up, nope, barely a breeze now.

Casting one last suspicious glance at the path, he determinedly shouldered the pole and took his first steps onto the path.

He was just beginning to relax when the relatively peaceful silence was ruptured by the sound of several stony clicks and scrapes as hundreds of lion shaped spouts made of gold erupted along the much wider path like ugly fast growing daisies.

Then they began spitting intermittent columns of flame and fireballs.

He took a breath then another and turned his head slowly to look over his shoulder.

"Flame throwers?! F***ing flame throwers!?!" he bellowed, his manners out the window by this point.

"Fire is normal."

"Flame throwers?!"

"Using fire is normal."

Harry took a few bracing breaths, set down his end of the basket, the woman following him. He rubbed his temples as she and lit up a pipe with the edge of one of the columns of flame in front of their path and sticking it back in her mouth.

She offered to turn back, Harry growled wordlessly at her.

He knew what he was going to do was probably stupid, but he couldn't stop now, the woman could just continue on if he backed out, but going forward without doing something, was suicidally foolish, even if this was apparently a rather normal path for the woman (by this point he suspected ridiculously high wages and a heavy dose of insanity on part of her employer).

'F**k caution.'

"Don't fear what is about to happen," he told her firmly. With that Harry, the basket, carry pole and woman all rose into the air.

Harry raised them upwards, higher and higher, and carried them until the clouds were a carpet beneath them.

It took Harry a surprisingly long time to lift them up the mountain, it must have been taller then he thought! The sweat was dripping from his forehead, but eventually, he spotted his destination as the clouds parted again before him and revealed…

A bloody castle!

Though the term castle didn't seem to do it justice!

It was enfolded in gentle swells and spiraling towers like the body of a snake. It was made entirely
out of white jade with stylized symbols etched with exquisite detail into each and every single solid brick. There were a hundred water falls falling through crystal and rose quartz spears, bridges of gold and silver, paths of jewels in the shapes of mosaics of fantastical creatures. Beautiful elegant cranes of every species and colour, thousands of them! flying, perched, or strolling elegantly through sprawling gardens of rainbow hued flowers and trees that embraced the entire site.

When Harry landed in what he presumed was the court yard with his passenger and cargo, he turned slowly around to face the woman that had not screamed or otherwise reacted to the presence of his power.

Only it wasn't the craggy faced woman with a pipe he found.

He scrambled back, leaning against a breadth of a crystal wall. The new figure was otherworldly beautiful with glowing pale gold skin, silky black hair that flowed like rivers about her body and interspersed with jewels, flowers and crane feathers topped off with a head dress of plump peaches. Her poor clothing had morphed into fine robes of glowing silk. He couldn't rightly describe her eyes when he met them; there was something about them that made it hard for him to settle on a color in his mind.

There were many reactions that Harry could have at that moment.

Harry sighed, rubbed his temples and took a seat at a handy nearby marble bench with...yes, that was goose down pillows.

"Why am I not surprised?" Harry muttered to himself as the glowing figure took a seat across from him, "oh wait, that's because things like this always happen to me."

The woman raised an eyebrow and said in a melodious voice.

"Of course it has."

Harry looked at her through his fingers; a little startled by the blunt affirmative, and then drawled dryly, "enlighten me."

The woman gave an amused laugh and said "if you knew who I was!" another chuckle, "you would find that demand vastly amusing."

"Who are you?" Harry asked, then to be polite, after all he had learned by now it didn't hurt to be polite with Abnormals of awesome power and finished with "Great Lady?"

The regal figure gave an approving nod at the address and replied, "we will get to that in a moment, but to explain a bit as to why you are here, that is something that is an intrinsic part of you, of others that have attracted the mountain, it is a mien that is beyond mundanity, it is those that bare the hand of great power or the great power to change."

Harry frowned, something about how she talked about change sparked a memory, "I remember the old monkey man talking about something like that," Harry said after a moment.

"I'm not surprised," her tone was decidedly dry, "considering who the founder of his race is." (8)

She sat back on her own bench which appeared out of nowhere and regarded him thoughtfully and asked "did you understand what he meant?"

Harry bit his lip "not fully."
She nodded, "in existence, there is an intricate web of cause and effect. A pebble that is knocked loose by a bamboo cutter's shoe can one day rain an avalanche on the heads of a great army. You are something like this pebble, but the possibilities and outcomes you generate, are generating, and will generate in the future will change the world into something else. Whether it is good or bad…that will be hard to decide. It can go either way. It is partly why after my mountain sensed you close and appeared before you, I decided to test you, to see if some of these changes will emerge from a source worthy for the effects he will garner."

Harry leaned back and was unsurprised by this point when a cup of tea in a delicate pearl cup appeared out of nowhere near his hand.

"Drink, it will rejuvenate you and heal your injuries, you have my word it is harmless."

Harry took a sip and was surprised at the delicate sweetness and that he did indeed feel infinitely better as soon as he swallowed his first sip.

"I must say that I am pleased. You have demonstrated kindness in your willingness to help another; you have shown bravery and perseverance with difficult roads ahead of you, and a level of self-sacrifice in risking exposing yourself to someone who may react badly to your uniqueness and see them and yourself out of danger."

"What's the name of this place?" Harry asked, ignoring the praise uncomfortably, "and who are you?".

She smiled and explained "this is Kunlun mountain, the Heavenly Palace were immortals congregate and talk, and where I guard the herb of immortality. I am Xi Wangmu." (9)

Harry nearly choked on his tea as he blanched. He set it aside, got up, and awkwardly bowed.

"Ah, so you have heard of me?" she asked amused, "please, there is no need of that. You are not one of my servants or disciples, take a seat."

Harry did, took up his tea with slightly shaking fingers, and concentrating on finishing it and rasped.

"I read about you in one of my books. You're the Royal Mother of the Western Paradise, the dispenser of prosperity, longevity, and eternal bliss. You were a favored subject during the golden age of Chinese poetry of the Tang Dynasty. You've been said to teach emperors, Shamans and Taoists and also considered the embodiment of yin, highest goddess, and ruler of female Transcendents." (9)

She hummed approvingly, "so you are learned, that is good. You will find as you continue your path that knowledge gained, learned, and used with wisdom will be your greatest power, even beyond what you will gain in the future." She leaned forward and said, "Being a teacher, I understand this very well, and if nothing else is imparted to my students, it's that lesson that is the most important."

Harry remembered reading about a few of her students who had not heeded her teachings and nodded.

Harry finished his tea and set his cup aside, not noticing her pleased secret smile when the cup disappeared.

After that, talk dissolved into an exchange of stories once the shock of being in the presence of one of China's most honoured goddesses wore off. As they talked, Harry mentioned the things he had seen, both normal and abnormal, and Xi Wangmu talked about her various encounters with deities, sages and heroes over the centuries.
Talk eventually shifted to favorite poems, then books, then art, then movies and television which yes, goddesses in mythical heavenly castles enjoyed from time to time.

Eventually after a light lunch of greens, seasoned rice and steamed black carp fillets with yak butter and after the plates vanished she stood, Harry quickly following her, and guided him further into the palace.

There Harry saw things that he would never forget. Art works of every age and style that took his breath away, made him cringe or left him confused, there were leopards, lions, and tigers of every colour and size strolling down paths with great stags and deer, antelope, horses and…Harry goggled, rather hairy unicorns that startled Harry when they occasionally burst into flame, still walking around calmly, she informed him were called Qilin (10). Birds of every colour also flew around, though the cranes, and some species of blue, black and green bird that looked vaguely like a crow with three legs with messages tied to their feet were the most pervasive (11).

There were also men and woman alike, sages and heroes alike that were either famous once or remained unknown to history that had gained immortality and chosen to remain and study or create or invent things. They bowed deeply at the goddess' passage.

Harry fed Buick sized koi in the garden of a hundred fountains, petted the silky fur of baby llamas as he watched twoheaders make bets on who had the longest distance spitting llama.

Harry was fed treats from immortal cooks that would never reach the tongues of mortals and the goddess was patient as he lingered the most with them, asking this and that excitedly and asking, politely, if he could watch them cook.

At night, Harry grew tired and was led to a luxurious room with a bed that Harry suspected was stuffed with clouds.

Harry lost count of the days, or was it weeks, he spent at the heavenly palace, and he loved everything, but he knew that he would not be able to remain. He didn't know why, he was the happiest he had ever been, he was content, and everyone accepted his presence and what he was. Some of the sages even taught him meditation and exercises that did wonders for his control with his magic.

Still he felt that itch that he could feel deep in his bones to the tip of his tail.

He knew when he woke up one morning with the calls of a nightingale and a parrot trying to outdo each other, that it was time to go.

He searched out all those he had made friends with, saying his good byes, they plied him with treats, trinkets and pouches of money and jewels which he put away with deep thanks and went to find Xi Wangmu.

The goddess had been waiting for him. At her feet was a new pack with an infinite space that could hold whatever he wanted and never show it outside or be any heavier than an empty bag, and a sturdy traveling staff of juniper.

"I knew that you would not be able to resist your own nature for long," she greeted him, "I am glad that we have meant and I have only one request before I send you off."

"Of course," he agreed respectfully, having become deeply grateful and fond of the goddess during his stay, "you have done a lot for me, I have no other idea to thank you for this experience."

She smiled and handed him a small velvet bag the size of a coin purse of deep lavender blue. He
looked inside at her nod and raised a curious eyebrow.

"Seeds?" he asked.

"Seeds," she agreed, "they are peach pits, an endless bag of them."

She chuckled at his wide eyed look and suddenly weary looks, "no worries, they are not from those peaches. These are the pits of a cousin to them. Peaches that cure diseases, increase health, and heal minor injuries."

Harry relaxed and seeing this she chuckled again, "immortal peaches is not something that you would want?"

Harry shuttered delicately, "what would I do with something like that?! I want to grow up and eventually maybe have a family someday, besides I don't want to be a kid forever. I love Peter Pan, but I don't completely hold with his philosophy."

She gave him a smile, "an interesting answer. Perhaps one day you will change your mind. Now, as for my favor," she reached into her sleeves and pulled out a single peach pit like the ones in the bag.

"As you journey, I ask that every time you break camp or at least leave an area, you drop a seed from the bag onto the ground."

To demonstrate she tossed her pit over her shoulder and to Harry's surprise a tree grew rapidly and burst into flower. Out of nowhere bees came and began harvesting nectar, flew away and the flowers turned into fruit which ripened quickly and the branches sagged under their weight.

Harry hummed thoughtfully. It was something that was definitely unusual, but seemed harmless, and he didn't see anything wrong with leaving peach trees behind him. He remembered the story of Johnny Appleseed. He supposed that concept could be applied to a magical peach, global version of that, and it had helped people in the long run in that tale, so he supposed it would be alright (12)(13).

He accepted the duty.

He packed everything in his new bag, handsome brocade with a stylized crane.

She handed him a new map and he said his final fair wells bowed deeply, then took to the sky.

As soon as he was in the air, Xi Wangmu and the heavenly castle and even the mountain disappeared, leaving flat grasslands spread out below him.

He shook his head in amazement and continued on his journey.

Ooo ooo ooo

November 15, Harry 11 years old, still in China…

Harry had only thought that he had been on the mountain for maybe about 2 weeks, but he was shocked to learn that 4 months had actually past! It was like the Hidden Place of the Trials. Harry suspected that time must pass differently sometimes in Hidden Places, though thankfully not in all of them, reflecting fondly on his little slice back in France.

The fact that he had turned 11 without realizing it didn't overly bother him. He had spent would could be considered the best birthday ever!

Harry spent the rest of his time in China traveling as usual, but as he traveled, toured, and learned
and entertained, he didn’t forget about his promise to the goddess and always remembered to plant a tree in the first patch of soil he could find after breaking camp.

Though Harry never heard them, odd reports of beautiful peach trees full of ripe fruit even when it was not in season, would be reported in the mundane news, and soon stories began to swell of the wonderful properties of the fruit would circulate following Harry as he continued his travels through China and in many other places to come.

Meanwhile, a couple of months back while Harry was on the mountain a week after his birthday…

An aggrieved Barn owl with a letter to one Harry Potter but no address tied to his leg returned to one Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall, unopened. (14)

Chapter End Notes

1. Random site that had common phrases, 2. Goggle maps, (3,4,5), Wikipedia, 7. The little girl is based off of the little girl from the beginning of the movie "Battle Royale" a Japanese horror/dystopian flick that I highly recommend to anyone, 8. Refer to the Chinese myth of the Monkey King, 9. From Chinese mythology, 10. a mythical hooved chimerical creature known in Chinese and other East Asian cultures, said to appear with the imminent arrival or passing of a sage or illustrious ruler, 11. In Chinese mythology and culture, the three-legged crow is called the Sanzuwu and is believed to be associated with the sun and is popular in art as well as stories, 12. Johnny Appleseed is an American folktale of a man who travelled the country planting apple seeds as he went, 13. These particular peaches are inspired form the story of a sage or monk who threw a peach pit over his shoulder and it magically grew into a great peach tree and gave the fruit for free to anyone who would want one as a lesson to a stingy fruit seller (I think it is a Chinese tale though I can’t remember the origins), 14. Basically the letter from Hogwarts did go out to Harry, but by this point his disappearance from Privet Dr. was already long realized by Dumbledore (his spy in Figg, who would have realized soon enough) and the order, though the rest of the Wizarding World is not aware yet. The letter was a last ditch attempt.
The Boy and the Bears.

Chapter Notes

A/N: Well, this is a long one. It will also be a bit intense in one part possibly so a bit of a warning for that. Also, Harry will be enacting a ritual based off a creation myth, if this causes offense then I apologize ahead of time. No offense intended. Further, I made up a community of people in this fic that I might get hammered on for inaccuracies. Just know I mostly made them up and added a few things from South Korean culture to them (modern name usage and such). So don't skewer me (because I have occasionally been skewered before), no offense intended.

A/N 2: in the previous chapter I mentioned an encounter between Harry and a snub nosed monkey and wrote the monkey wrong. Thank you for the correction Arcturus, who said that: "the snub nosed monkeys hanging from their tails: all new world (Americas) monkeys have prehensile tails; NO old world (Eurasia and Africa) monkeys do." So yeah, just replace it with a local tree bearing animal that likes fruit in your minds. Sorry about the flub up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 27, Harry 11yrs old, South Korea...

Harry took a deep breath and snuggled deeper into his coat as he considered what to do.

He had decided to take a train ride and relax in luxury for once during the less leg of his journey for the rest of the way out of China. He had eaten delicious food, had a riveting conversation with a Mongolian business man who sat in the seat across from him and knew English as he talked about summers with his family at a horse ranch and the delicious foods that his mother made, some of which the man knew the recipes for much to Harry's delight, and was willing to proudly share them with Harry, who reciprocated, passing on a few of his own.

After he had disembarked the train, saying goodbye to the nice man, he had taken a ferry the rest of the way to South Korea and was currently walking around through the bustling city of Incheon (1).

The city located in northwestern South Korea, bordering Seoul and Gyeonggi to the east and Korea's third most populous city after Seoul and Busan.

The temperatures were not quite as bad as that brief chilly stopover in Xilin Gol (somewhere near or in Mongolia), but it was still cooler then he was used to after spending a few years avoiding winter.

This winter though he wanted to embrace a little of the actual season for once.

Harry decided, after some thought and a perusal of a local magazine, to visit The Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ for short).

The Zone is a specially designated area designed to create the most favorable business and living environment where foreign nationals can live and invest freely and conveniently. IFEZ, still in development, is planned to be a self-contained living and business district featuring air and sea transportation, a logistics complex, an international business center, financial services, residences,
schools, hospitals, and shopping and entertainment centers. It was an interesting concept, and he could see the foreign influences here and there (he got his first Big Mac from a local McDonalds, extra pickles).

He saw a couple of movies, kipped in a hotel now that he had money for it and for the hell of it (again for the first time, though not planning on making a constant thing of it) and dropped a peach pit in a nearby park before moving on.

He went to a few sports complexes as well, the sport enthusiast in him (though not as strong as the food enthusiast) made sure to watch some games such as a football game at Incheon Asiad Main Stadium, and a baseball game at The Munahk Sports Complex, and even though they were both only practices, it was still fun and he ate lots of snacks.

He walked along the boardwalk with a large clam shell filled with various raw fish and rode amusement park rides and sold a few sketches, which he still liked to do despite the fact that he now had money to work with for quite a long time to come (how the gold he was given by the immortals form the heaven castle conformed to its worth in present currency of wherever he happened to be was something he was unsure of). There was something about the appreciative regard of others willing to spend money on something that he had created that fed that small corner of himself that thirsted to prove himself, though it was often barely acknowledged.

Eventually he exhausted his attention for the locale, and after he acquired himself several books from the bookstore, he walked to the bus station where he boarded the next leaving bus.

He made sure to get let off on the first bit of nowhere they drove through on their way to another city. The driver thought he was nuts, but didn't stop him, and when the coast was clear Harry took to the air, by this point tired of Normal transportation.

Ooo ooo ooo

December 30, South Korea…

Harry traveled through a variety of cities during his stay in South Korea, such as going to Seoul, South Korea's cultural and economic heart where he toured the Palace of Wonderful Blessing that was once inhabited by one of Korea's old kings. He sketched the vibrantly dressed men during the changing of the guard in front of old ancient gates that stood in silent attention and after he was done doing that he would stroll through the busy markets, particularly the night markets, near by the gates and stare avidly at the thousands of different foods and ingredients for sale.

Harry visited the Koex Aquarium, one of the largest indoor aquariums out there, and spent several days returning to sketch the exotic water life or gaze hungrily at a few rather tasty looking individuals.

Harry's favorite thing in Seoul, other than the markets and the Aquarium, had to be the Nanta Cookin’ production, going each evening to the Hoam Art Hall during his stay to watch, and often tried to incorporate some of the frenetic moves (the less messy ones) by the performers that combined music and humour into his own cooking style. He laughed each time he went, never getting tired of it (2).

Ooo ooo ooo

January 4, Suwon Hwaseong , South Korea… (2.5)

Harry was currently in Suwon Hwaseong, sometime after his stay in Seoul, which is an impressively
constructed wall surrounding the center of Suwon, the provincial capital of Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. The sprawling fortress was built from 1794 to 1796 by King Jeongjo of the Joseon Dynasty to house and honour the remains of his father Prince Sado, who had been executed by being locked alive inside a rice chest by his own father King Yeongjo after failing to obey the command to commit suicide.

From what Harry understood the Prince never really got a chance to rule before his demise mainly because of a later believed to be mental illness that caused him to randomly kill people and be a serial rapist. It had taken him roughly 8 days to die.

Harry had shivered after reading that little tidbit.

The Wall was located 30 kilometres south of Seoul—an easy flight for Harry, who had interspersed the travel with a bit of hiking here and there- and enclosing much of central Suwon, the Fortress includes King Jeongjo's palace Haenggung, which Harry took to sketching.

Harry spent a few days walking along the expansive walls, and hanging upside down from the roof of a watchtower.

During his time there, he was startled but then quickly unsurprised, given his experience so far that the rumors about the area being haunted were actually true.

He watched ghosts of soldiers and workers who had died there playing Ssirum, a form of wrestling/combat that is similar to sumo wrestling in some of its moves, actually rather enjoying the combative competition among the pale specters from his hiding place in the shadows and rafters. Eventually, when the ghosts did notice his presence, further reassured Harry by not doing anything against him or otherwise being scary, so he had ventured closer and closer to the specters until eventually he was sitting among them cheering and booing and making bets.

During his time here he also had the ironic experience of learning how to exorcise a site of the supernatural from a dead priest who had died during the wall's construction when a brick fell on his head (and thus no longer able to go exorcise anything), though Harry was polite enough not to try anything out here, much to the priest's disappointment.

He stuck around longer to learn this, since it might come in handy someday, given his track record with Abnormals, and remembering the creepy ghost way back in China. The priest had a ritual for both spirits and demons (which Harry was leery of learning actually did exist).

After his time there, Harry traveled further inwards, playing tourist or hidden student or artist when the mood strikes him until finally after a little over a month, he decided that it was time to settle somewhere for a bit and take time to digest information and pay attention to his latest acquired books.

Ooo ooo ooo

February 4, South Korea, The Sobaek Mountains...

Harry was currently flying through an unpopulated area of what was dubbed by South Korea as "The Spine" a south-westerly mountain range that ran through the country on a rough diagonal and Harry's current prime place to settle in and do some research.

He frowned at the rocks below, doing a lazy swoop, and munching on a sandwich. He paused in his chewing and humming Endless Love under his breath (3). He could have sworn he felt something, almost a tingly sensation in his skin but it was so brief and so fast that he finally shrugged, figuring that he had imagined it. He continued to hum contentedly to himself.
He had just landed in a promising clearing nearby some trees when he felt a sharp pain erupt from his neck. He didn't even have time to feel the dart before he keeled over, unconscious.

Ooo ooo ooo

Several hours later...

"Gom se ma rig a han chib eh it ssuh..."

Harry groaned, trying to rub his head, he felt as if he had been hit in the head with a barrel.

"...appa gom, umma gom, ai gi gom..."

Was that singing? It took him a second, since he was still a little senseless for his omnilingualism to filter the words into English...

"...Daddy bear is fat, mommy bear is thin, and baby bear is cute!..."

Harry blinked as the world came into focus through heavy eyelids as he registered that it was a very young child's voice singing. Sure enough, as the world whirled into focus when he moved his head to the side, he spotted a little girl sitting on the edge of a bed that someone had tucked him into.

The little girl was kicking her feet and waving around a stuffed rabbit...

"...Uksu, uksu, well done..." (4)

Before the girl could gear up for another refrain, he managed to rasp out something resembling words.

"Where am I?"

The little girl, who didn't understand him but did understand that the stranger was awake, started, squealed, and jumped off the bed zipping away though a set of curtains, calling for her mother.

Harry managed to get himself into a seated position blearily looking around the simple room made entirely of wood without any windows when he overheard a scolding voice of an adult woman standing outside the curtain.

"...Told you before Min-soo, you were not to go near the Outsider, he could be dangerous!"

"But Mommy!"

A deep sigh, "I know you're curious, but we make rules for a reason, now go to the kitchen to await your father."

"Yes momma," the little girl mumbled sulkily before her little footsteps could be heard padding away.

The woman shook her head as she entered the room, then the soft admonishment look of a parent dissolved instantly from her face to be replaced by a very hard and flinty expression.

"So your awake," She grunted, stating the obvious, "you have a lot of questions to answer young man."

Harry mentally groaned not only from his headache but from the fact that this unhappy figure who was currently looming over him, did not speak English, which was quickly confirmed when he tried
a general greeting of hello only to have her frown at him in incomprehensibility, though it was quickly determined also between the two that he did understand her.

The woman, who introduced herself as Hye-Jin, and much to the frustration and that of others, Harry was not able to answer as many questions as they would have liked.

According to his host, she was a scout who had been hunting with her team in the woods when he had been spotted by one of her hunters, and subdued with a knock-out dart, then taken in for questioning when he awoke.

Harry was not pleased to have been taken prisoner, and was further dismayed when it turned out that The Valley of the Blessed, the name of the place he had stumbled upon, was another Hidden Place, a place that very much did not appreciate being found.

When he expressed his confusion during his interrogation on what the Blessed were, Hye-Jin answered by transforming into the biggest bear he had ever seen and back again.

He would later find out that the entire village was made up of entirely of these bear shape-shifters, his first real experience with a community of Abnormals. (5)

Harry's excuse (after a lot of yes and no questions and hand gestures) for his presence in their land that had not been graced by the presence of an outsider for several centuries was by pure accident. His age somewhat helped in this quarter, and an earlier examination of his person by their head healer (which Harry assumed was a doctor of some sort) while he was unconscious (something Harry was not happy with) had also revealed that he was a magic user, and his youth combined with his power might have accidentally facilitated his entrance, said the Healer and agreed upon by the Elders, some of the oldest and most revered of the Blessed.

Then he had been asked whether there were other magic users like him, like his parents, nearby that might go looking for him.

Harry was not familiar with human Abnormals, and was honest in admitting that he had been traveling alone and didn't rightly even know if he was human himself really (the last part uncommunicated).

His interrogator grumbled at that but eventually when nothing more was forthcoming from him, eventually finished her interrogation by informing him that only the Blessed were allowed to cross the Great Barrier that protected their civilization from humans. The fact that he had, even by accident, done so, was a threat to her people. The fact that he was a child was the only thing keeping him from being killed outright.

She had informed him curtly that his magic was now bound by the use of a golden bracelet etched with symbols that he didn't understand, and that he would never be able to leave the valley, and that he was to be placed with her family.

He was required to learn the ways of the Blessed and participate in the daily life and duties of being an adolescent in the village, a conclave that was situated in the varied honey combed caves of a small mountain range at the heart of Blessed lands surrounded by dense forest.

With that, she left Harry to come to grips with his new fate.

Ooo ooo ooo

A few days later he was deemed sufficiently recovered (having taken this long perhaps due to the fact that he was a non-blessed adolescent boy) from the knock-out arrows to begin his integration
process.

Harry stared sullenly at the small pile of new cloths, a tunic of faded green and loose legged brown pants with a green cloth belt, rubbing the gleaming surface of the golden bracelet on his left wrist.

He scratched at the edge of the bracelet. It itched.

His satchel that he had been given by Xi Wangmu which currently held all his worldly possessions was gone.

Hye-Jin had informed him that in an effort to help him acclimate, everything that had been attached to his person had been removed.

He didn't think that the Blessed would be able to get their paws inside his satchel or destroy it; it was a gift from a goddess after all. Likely they were storing it somewhere.

The first thing he needed to do was get this bracelet off.

The second was to get his satchel.

The third was to get out of here, which he reckoned would be easier once his magic was free.

For the moment though, he would just have to play along…sort of.

He pulled on the provided cloths, and grudgingly admitted that they were at least comfortable.

He padded out of the room provided to him and peeked into the kitchen where Hye-Jin, the little girl called Min-soo, about 4 or five years old, and a swarthy man who was a big, muscular, and hairy as his wife (a body trend among the Blessed, reflecting their bear side) were sitting eating bowls of some soup of ox blood and vegetables called, he later learned, haejangguk. (6)

Harry reluctantly took a seat at what had before been a happy early morning family table but became tense at his presence.

"So you are Harry?" the husband, who introduced himself as Sung-min, "I must say that outsiders are a lot smaller than I thought they would be."

It was a strained attempt at levity, Harry shrugged.

He cleared his throat, "it seems you understand our tongue but don't speak it yourself?"

Harry nodded.

"I understand that it took a while to discern the circumstances to your arrival, and while your understanding us, somehow, without knowing how to communicate back will be a bit tricky, you'll soon pick things up quickly."

Harry appreciated the man's awkward attempt at conversation and reassurance, despite the fact that he was clearly uncomfortable with the situation he now found himself with, an outsider living with his family, something that Harry was also uncomfortable with, so he just nodded a small token towards their mutual unhappiness with the situation.

He finished his food without further comment, which was rather tasty, took the small satchel that was filled with a lunch for later, and left the strained atmosphere of his host family.

He took a seat on the front stoop, eyeing his surroundings.
It was like being in a giant beehive made of stone with hundreds of stone paths, stairways, and rope bridges criss-crossing all over the place through the heart of the village.

His current abode was situated about a few levels below the top most levels of the village, which did make for a great view of the village itself and the very long drop below.

Hye-jin had informed him that he was going to be working with the basket weavers, a simple useful chore that didn't require much communication from his end.

He was to meet another, a girl his own age who would be his guide to the Crafters Cave, where Harry was to begin his first day of making himself useful to the village weaving baskets, this guide also had basket weaving duty, which is why she would be showing him around.

Ji-woo is a rowdy girl who practically flung herself from one ledge/stair/path to another. She had the same wild hair worn loose down to her waist that was worn similarly by both men and women of the Blessed. Unlike Hye-jin's and her husband's hair which was a brown so dark it might as well be black, hers was a very light almost ash brown that made her large dark burgundy eyes nearly pop in contrast.

She was dressed similarly to himself, though there was hints of muscle definition and a more superior height in her cloths which showed a bit of a tighter fit then his loser cloths.

He was unceremoniously dragged after her after she gave him a hurried greeting. Apparently they were going to be late if they didn't hurry up.

One near-death experience dash later, Harry was dragged, panting into a wide open cave were other children around their age group had already gathered.

Head Craft's Woman Chun-ja was the overseer of the Crafters Cave. Here, under her iron dictator ship, weave work, leather work and other crafts needed for everyday necessities and toil were cranked out in an environment of punctuality, perfection and utter quiet.

He could see why talking wouldn't be an issue.

She made particular no bones about her dislike of him, and was further displeased when it turned out Harry, outside of wearing a certain pair of magical gloves, was pants at weaving.

Harry was immensely grateful when he was summerly kicked out of Crafters Cave in the woman's sheer disgust with his efforts and results.

Harry took the opportunity to explore.

By the time that the sun had set and Ji-woo had stumbled out of the cave, muttering under her breath, Harry had managed to find his way back, suspecting that he was supposed to remain in Ji-woo's care/watch during his acclimation process.

He was rather cranky himself since he had not been able to find any sign yet of either his things or anything viable to free him from the bracelet. He had even tried a rock of all things and banged on it for a solid hour with not even a dent.

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry had three more days in Crafters Cave, tossed from one thing to another in the hopes that he displayed some usability, but he remained cheerfully untalented.
Not that he was completely pants at everything, he was marginally decent with pottery, but he made sure to down play even marginal capability. Not looking to be stuck in a cave all day.

Eventually his host family was informed via a message written down, given to Harry, which he handed over to Hye-jin informing her that Harry was banned from Crafters Cave.

The next morning he was informed that he would be joining Ji-woo in cleaning fish that was brought in by the fishermen/women that went out in small boats to a gigantic fresh water lake on the other side of the mountain.

The kitchen overseer, a large burly man with beady dark eyes was a bit more relaxed then the crafts overseer, but even he to became frustrated after a few days and Harry showed little to no talent in cleaning fish (something that Harry was actually exceedingly good at, given his food proclivities).

After being put in various positions in the kitchens, Weavers Caves, even suggested to have him watching children (Harry refused outright) and accidentally losing a few ox that took a scout team hours to find, he was collectively deemed a useless idiot and by this point Hye-jin suspected sabotage.

Harry of course gave her innocent looks and shrugs that clearly stated "oh well."

Despite all his efforts to annoy his hosts/jailers, he had yet to find a way out of this mess, which is until Hye-jin herself unknowingly provided him with the solution to his problem.

Hye-jin had sat him down one morning and informed him curtly that because he had the usefulness of a toddler, and effused to co-operate, he would be treated like a toddler and had informed him that he would be dropped off in the village's version of kindergarten/daycare to learn the most basic of lessons that all toddlers and young children are required to learn.

By this point Harry suspected that she suspected that he was purposefully sabotaging his efforts and had decided on a method of humiliation as a tactic of approach to get him to co-operate.

So after a hearty meal of Kimchi and rice (7), he was left with Min-soo holding his hand, for once Jin not accompanying him, and tugging him in the direction of Crèche Cave where a man by the name of Sung-ki pulled him into an enthusiastic hug of welcome.

Teacher Sung-ki, who was a shaman in training to the head-shaman, his grandfather, and was simply put, teddy bearish. He didn't treat his attendance as an intended humiliation at all, but like he was a warmly welcomed visitor.

The other toddlers and young children were soon crawling all over him, chattering questions and exclaiming at everything from his weeny arms, his pale white skin, his short hair, and green eyes (green not being a colour found among the Blessed).

Min-soo, as the one whose house Harry was staying in and thus in her mind the owner of the interesting weeny teenager, sat in his lap when they all gathered for lecture/story time on the rug before teacher Sung-ki.

The teacher chuckled at the sight then said in a brisk manner, "Well children, what story from our illustrious history shall I relate today?"

There were calls of favorite titles that meant nothing to Harry.

Sung-ki seemed to realize this and asked him directly, "You've been with us a little under a fortnight Harry, have you been informed of the origins of the Blessed?"
Harry blinked when he realized that no, he hadn't, all he knew was about the present culture he found himself in, not the origins. He shook his head.

The teacher chuckled, slapping his hands together, "well you're in for a treat young lad!" then his voice dropped into the smooth dramatic tones of one about to delve into a serious bit of story telling.

The children, despite likely having heard the story numerous times before, settled and listened rapturously.

"Long ago in ages past uncounted, there was a She-Bear by the name of Ungnyeo and a Tiger who wished for themselves to be human. They lived together in a cave, the cave at the very top of the Blessed mountain it is believed, and prayed to the divine king Hwanung to be made human. Hwanung heard their prayers and decided to give them a chance to fulfill their desire so he gave them 20 cloves of garlic, and bundle of mugwort and ordered them to stay out of the sunlight, told to only eat this food for 100 days, and not leave the cave into sunlight. Due to hunger, the tiger, whose appetite was as voracious as his teeth" Sung-ki made an exaggerated snarling face, making the children giggle, "left the cave after roughly 20 days, but the she-bear remained inside, still determined. After 21 days, she was rewarded for her diligence and was transformed into a woman."

"Ungnyeo was grateful, (especially for not having to wait another 79 days with nothing but garlic and Mungwort to eat) and made offerings to Hwanung in thanks. Eventually though, her loneliness and lack of a mate drove her into depression, and she began to pray beneath a sacred betula tree to be blessed with a child. Hwanung heard her prayers and was deeply moved. He took Ungnyeo as his wife and soon after, she gave birth to a son, Dangun, who many Outsiders, having heard our founders tale as well, believe to have founded the peoples of this country."

"What no one knows however, is that Ungnyeo didn't completely shed her bear form. And her later offspring, twin daughters, also bore the ability of carrying the bear and the human within them."

"They eventually found mates of their own and all their children since have the ability to become a bear, and thus the Blessed were founded." (8)

The children clapped at the end of the story.

He chuckled and sent the children off to go play in a section at the back of the class filled with toys.

Harry approached the teacher with a thoughtful look on his face and grabbed a bit of parchment and a piece of charcoal and began drawing.

When he was done, he handed it to the man.

Sung-ki found a rather well rendered picture of the Blessed mountain and forest with what looked like a curved line over top it.

"The Barrier?" Sung-ki guessed.

The boy nodded, tapping the arched line.

Sung-ki sighed, he supposed that he shouldn't have been surprised. He had heard from his grandfather who had discussed the boy's less then co-operative attempts at fitting in with the other elders, and figured that it was only a matter of time before someone sat the lad down and better explained things. Hye-jin was not the type to wax explanation, usually stating relevant facts without background information, the same with her husband. They were both scouts so it couldn't be blamed really, it was the Shaman's prerogative to teach the finer stories of history, so he sat the boy down and explained.
"The barrier was created by an ancient non-blessed, the only one that was ever considered friend to our people. Many non-blessed, or Outsiders, as they are now referred to, became jealous of our bear selves and some even hunted us, thinking that our parts would be strong medicine or magic for their own benefit. This non-blessed saw what his fellows were doing and so he gathered together all the Blessed under the Great Barrier, with enough animals to multiply and hunt, and a great lake filled with all manner of fish for us to eat, and fertile land to crow crops and and fruit filled forests. He closed us off from the greedy hands of Outsiders. He himself remained outside the barrier after its completion and disappeared. The elders of the time however were told that should the Blessed ever need to venture outside of the barrier that the way would always be opened to one of the Blessed. One must walk as bear to pass."

Sung-ki eyed him shrewdly, "your presence here has raised many questions because of this, and caused quite a great deal of alarm. Do you understand now why you are being made to stay? If there are other outsiders who have the same power to cross our barrier without the need of bear form, then we are in danger. That is why you cannot leave."

Harry looked thoughtful for a time, and then nodded before venturing off to watch the children play.

Sung-ki gave a relieved sigh. Maybe the lad would now see some sense and try to make the best of things, without access to his magic he would be unable to cross the barrier.

He sometimes wondered if the elders had suspected that someday an outsider like this boy might breech their home. The construction of the bracelet he now wore, made him wonder. (9)

After class Harry returned, helped prepare dinner, ate and wandered off to bed, not bothering to give his host family any trouble or even a dirty look.

Hye-jin congratulated herself on a plan well-wrought, but just to be sure she would have him attend the classes for a few more days to drive the point home then try him out perhaps with the semesters?

The next morning however, Harry was already gone.

Hye-jin was slightly worried about this, they were supposed to be keeping an eye on the boy. He was wandering around the village on his own a lot more then he should have been, but being a mother she knew that sometimes children needed their own space to figure things out.

Fortunately, Jin-soo stopped by to inform her that she had taken Harry to the sacred cave, the boy had indicated (via pictures and hand gestures) that he wanted to meditate there for whatever reason.

Hye-jin had not thought the boy the type to meditate, and was mildly interested to note that it was still a practice amongst outsiders. Meditation is a common practice amongst the Blessed, had she known, she might have taken him to the meditation caves sooner.

Jin-soo had also told her that the boy was likely going to be there awhile as he'd been carrying a rather large pack of food, Jin-soo wrinkling her nose as she mentioned the strong garlic smell.

Hye-jin decided that there was no harm in this, the sacred caves were a place where not only where many practiced in the spiritual arts, but was also a place favored for meditation, though usually more favored by the old, or expectant mothers, went to clear their thoughts.

When the sun had set and dinner had long passed and Harry had not returned, Hye-jin thought that it was about time that someone went to bring the boy down.

It took her a bit of time to trek the long winding climb up to the top of the mountain, but it was a rather pleasant evening so it was enjoyable.
She paused, surveying the dark rocky top, taking a deep breath of the clear air and enjoying the view of the Blessed lands spread below her before turning to the business at hand.

She didn't call his name at first. After all, there had been cases of mediators sometimes venturing into deep trances, even young ones of Harry's age, and she didn't want to endanger him if that was the case, sometimes bodies did not take to the shock of transition well.

She gave a brief respectful vow to the entrance of the sacred cave before stepping into the darkness, raising her lantern that she had brought with her high.

There was no Harry.

She ventured deeper into the cave, the tunnel narrowing further as she went along, and she was forced to duck as she walked.

Eventually she came into what was considered to be the inner sanctum of the cave. A small cozy cubby area that was just big enough to fit maybe three or four well filled men comfortably, or one large bear and tiger.

Still the boy was not to be seen.

She frowned, wondering if he had already headed down and they had missed each other. She had just turned around when a glint reflecting off of gold caught her eye coming from a tight crevice at the back of the cave.

She stepped forward kneeled down and peered inside and thus found the boy.

Harry was sitting patiently on what she recognized was a set of his blankets from his bedroom, the light of the lantern had caught on the gold of the binding bracelet which was exposed as he currently had his sleeves rolled up.

The space he was currently in was barely big enough for a full sized man unless he bent at the waist.

Since he was watching her calmly with his intense outsider green eyes, she growled "Harry! Come out of there this instant! It is long passed the beginning of sleeping hours!"

The boy eyed her then shook his head.

She gave an exasperated huff, fists going to her hips, and here she had thought that perhaps they were getting through to the boy.

"hiding in a hard to reach places will not help you any," she said, "I can have a group of miners up here and pulling you out before you can so much as blink."

Harry blinked slowly, mockingly, then pulled out the sack that the girl had mentioned from earlier and opened it in her direction.

She leaned forward at his beckoning gesture and found what looked like her entire stock of Garlic from the kitchen, a small peeling knife, and also her entire stock of Mungwort.

She frowned in confusion.

Then the boy gave her a picture of a well rendered bear.

It clicked then what the boy was trying to do.
She folded the picture and put it in her pocket and sighed then crouched down again.

"Child, it eases my mind that you have finally accepted that you will have to remain with the Blessed, but you cannot be one of us by doing this."

The boy gave her a stubborn look, folding his arms across his chest.

She tried the logical approach, "the story of how our great mother became from bear to woman is from ages passed and was from the desire of a bear to be a human. A human cannot become a bear the same way."

The boy frowned at her and raised an eyebrow, the silent response saying "oh yeah? How do you know that for sure?"

Hye-jin managed to interpret this and huffed "it is simply how it is, outsiders are not the Blessed and can never be truly blessed because they were not born of a bear to begin with."

Harry didn't look convinced; his arms remaining crossed the look definitely stubborn.

Hye-jin sighed, getting to her feet.

"Fine then, I shall leave you for a time to think on it."

She took the lamp with her, hopefully spending a night in a dark cave would be added incentive to get him to leave.

The next day the boy didn't return and this time her husband went up to try to talk sense into the boy, but when that didn't work, Hye-jin took the matter to the Elders.

Head Shaman Soo-ki, upon listening to Hye-jin's story and perusing the picture the boy gave her, informed Harry's host family that they could not interfere. Hye-jin had been shocked and asked him why, and the Shaman had indicated that, while the boy was unknowing of their ways and an outsider, he was a part of their community now, declared as such by the elders themselves, and had unknowingly enacted a spiritual quest of communion with Hwanung. Granted it was something usually done by shamans, and never really attempted by anyone else, but regardless it is sacred law that they were to not interfere until the boy left the cave himself. Even if it would mean he lay in there and stared to death.

After that Hye-jin, and everyone else were ordered to not disturb the boy.

Ooo ooo ooo

5 days into the cave...

Harry sighed as he lay back on his nest of blankets. He had spent most of the time pretty much bored out of his skull. He sang all the songs he could remember off the top of his head and made up some, admittedly awful ones that got old quick. He composed recipes in his head, tried to see how much math he remembered form his school days, took a few whacks at the bracelet with a nearby rock and so on.

Eventually he used the sharp edge of his whomping rock to begin to etch pictures on the stone.

10 days...

"I got a lovely bunch of coconuts, Dee-diddy-dee!"
13 days…
Harry slept through this one,

16 days…
Harry had long become inert to the scent of garlic enhanced sweat drenched unwashed body.

19 days…
He had run out of garlic and mungwart.

20 days…
The small walls were filled with etching of fantastical and mundane creatures, star constellations and tic tac toe games.

21 days…
Harry had lost track of time by this point and could barely move. His lips were parched and dry from dehydration when his water eventually ran out as well. No one had come in to check on him, and he was beginning to suspect that he was going to die.

22 days…
Harry didn't die, though he felt it might be an improvement. The agonizing pain of hunger had long since turned into a sort of numb sensation.

He lost all sense of self, at times he even wondered if he was breathing.

Unknown day…
"You are a persistent fellow."

The breathing thing lying on the stone ground of a cave didn't blink at the sudden presence that filled the dim stony space.

The voice sighed, "Persistent indeed."

Then another voice echoed throughout the cave, almost mocking "of course he is! If you hadn't been so lazy, wanting to sleep in just a little longer he wouldn't be in the mess he's in now, but no! You just had to be persnickety!"

The first voice grunted "really my dear, at least a little bit of difference in front of the boy?"

The second voice huffed, "well it not like he's even registering your grand presence husband! Look at him."

Both voices regarded the prone figure for a time. Then the first sighed "you are right, best we get to it then? The boy did wake us up, and does deserve to have at least one of his desires fulfilled, I am curious to see what the world has made of itself in our absence."

"Indeed," the second replied agreeably, "perhaps a few cubs to toddle at our feet in our travels?" the second purred.

The first gave a husky chuckle, "my dear I do love you, let's tend to business then."
Great light, light like the heart of a sun filled the cave. The emaciated form of the still alive Harry Potter was dragged upwards into the light. Golden hands, a larger masculine set and a set of smaller daintier ones ran along the boy's body, molding the brilliance to the boy's body, and the glowing body into something else entirely.

When the light disappeared, the first voice huffed and said "there, can we go now love? I have granted the boy's wish."

"Yes, my love" the second gave an unseen eye roll, "let us venture."

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry came to with a groan.

He felt as if he were waking from the most horrible nightmare ever.

He looked around him blurry, trying to get to his feet, and then flopping onto this belly.

He did this several times before he realized what was wrong.

He looked down at his hands, and then turned his head to observe the rest of him.

When he was done he let out a great laugh of ecstatic triumph that in no way sounded like a boy's laugh.

Ooo ooo ooo

Hye-jin was concerned. It had been way too long.

Each day she had gone to the elders, asking, demanding, and then begging to check on the boy.

They refused.

Certainly many wanted to interfere, but the Shaman held the greatest authority amongst the elders and he was highly respected. If he said that they were not to interfere, even if it seemed rather cruel, then no one was to interfere.

Finally, after a little more than a month had passed, Hye-jin came to the conclusion that the boy was dead by this point.

Despite being an outsider, it was such a waste of life! He was so young!

It had made her weep when she thought of the grim business that awaited them in that cave. She promised to herself that she would give him the proper funereal. It was a waste but he had died part of them, it was only right.

When another month had passed, then another, until the 100 days from the story had finally passed, She went to the Shaman yet again. This time the elder gave her permission. So she took two strong stomached able bodied scouts with her, along with a stretcher, and some canvas to cover the body, and retrieve the boy's remains.

Half way up the bridge though, there path was blocked by a bear.

The three Blessed froze.

It was a young bear, not even an adult, perhaps a yearling, that was making its careful way down the
They were the people of the bear, seeing a bear was not uncommon, but unlike the various russets, browns, and blacks of the Blessed, this bear had messy fur of pure gold, like sunlight reflected on water.

It wasn't the fact that the bear was also coming from the direction of the sacred caves or even the fur colouring that made her say the name, but the vibrant green eyes that stared out at them in consideration.

"Harry?"

The three blessed backed away reverently as the bear began walking forward again.

By the time they reached level with the general hubbub of the community, bear form and people form alike froze as the smaller bear ambled into their midst, being led by Hye-jin who looked to be in several levels of shock and awe, with the no longer needed body bearers, not knowing what else to do, discarded their equipment and tagged along behind them.

The Blessed parted before the procession.

Word must have reached the elders as they were already waiting for them by the time Hye-jin and the golden bear entered the centre of town.

The Shaman stepped forward and bowed deeply, the rest of the elders following suit.

Then they stood and the Shaman addressed the distinctly uncomfortable looking bear.

"You have done what we have not believed possible. You have now truly been made one of the Blessed, as true as the form you now wear. For this great act, in honor of legends you have reawakened to the world again, you may ask of us anything you desire."

The bear grunted, waddled up and waved the binding bracelet, still attached to him, under the shaman's nose.

"Of course," the man agreed quickly.

With but a touch to the bracelet, the jewelry popped of (much to the golden bear's consternation) and fell to the ground.

The bear kicked the affronting jewelry aside, and promptly fell into oblivion over the edge with a satisfied grunt.

Then the bear took a claw and drew a rough rendering of a satchel with birds on the side.

"Your things, of course."

A nod from the Shaman and a nearby attendant whisked away and returned with all of Harry's things.

The Shaman himself reverently secured the bag to the bear's back with some the best woolen cloth in the village.

Then the bear whirled around and began making his way out of the village.

The Shaman and Hye-jin transformed and followed the golden bear.
The golden bear halted at the edge of the western most side of the barrier.

The Shaman transformed and bowed again, "please, can you not stay? You are the first of us to be touched by the power that has not been known since our great mother herself; will you not at least consider staying with us? You are now one of us truly; you would have a home here, held in the highest of reverence."

The golden bear regarded the shaman for a moment then huffed again. The bear turned from the man and the other bear. The crane satchel opened of its own occurred and a small velvet bag emerged, floating in the air, which drew itself open and from inside, a singular fruit pit emerged.

The two Blessed watched this, confused, especially when the seed floated a few feet away from their position and was dropped dismissively on a bare patch of ground.

Smaller bag retreating into the crane satchel, the golden bear with the green eyes gave one final huff and lumbered across the threshold of the barrier and continued to walk without turning round to see the surprised bear people watching as a peach tree began to grow at a fast paced speed before them.

Ooo ooo ooo

May 15, Harry is aged 11, South Korea, still in the Sobaek Mountains...

Harry lumbered on his four paws for a good 3 hours before he felt safe enough to change back.

How he knew to change back he wasn't sure.

It was like flicking a finger; he just could without remembering how.

The bear melted away and left a rather naked Harry Potter shivering in nothing but his baggage.

Harry quickly pulled out some cloths and a bottle of water some soap and a few towels.

After Harry had thoroughly cleaned himself off, tossing aside the dirty linen into a disposable bag to dump later, and now comfortably dressed in his own cloths ('oh synthetic fabric how I missed thee!'). He felt significantly better.

Strangely, after observing himself post waking up as a bear, he had to admit that he looked a lot better off than he had thought he would.

He was uncertain if being turned into a bear or some extra divine intervention had aided him, but he was bodily the same condition he had been upon entering the cave, only just a bit hungry and rather strongly adverse to Mungwort (though not garlic for some other strange reason).

He also didn't remember much from his time in the cave.

It have been a desperate, last ditch plan admittedly. He was unsure if it would have even worked, and had hoped that at the very least the Blessed would see that he would go through desperate lengths to leave.

It was his bad luck it was misinterpreted as him wanting to become part of their society further.

Harry rolled his eyes at his own see-saw fortune.

Oh well, whatever had happened, obviously something had taken pity on him and he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth.
He wondered if it was a good or a bad thing that he was getting less and less bothered by the notion of divine beings traipsing through his life?

Oh well. Time for some fishing!

Chapter End Notes

A/n: not completely happy with the chap, and I am well aware of a few plot holes, but those should not affect the story later. As to why Harry didn't die, that is for later in the fic to be revealed. And no, Harry has little memory of his time in the cave and is not likely to remember it in the future.

1. based on Korean cities and locale based off of a combination of Korean Documentary and Wikipedia, 2. Nanta Cookin’ is a South Korea and Chinese non-verbal comedy show that inco-operate traditional samul nori rhythm. It premiered in October 1997 in Hoam Art Hall in Seoul. If it has actual recipes I am unsure, I am pretending that it does for the sake of the fic, 2.5. The information about Suwon Hwaseong and Prince Sado comes from Wikipedia, Encyclopedia Britanica, and The 10 Most Insane Rulers in History video on youtube which first alerted me to information on Prince Sado, link on my profile. Suwan is also considered a masterpiece of construction in its time utilizing the newest forms of math and invented construction techniques during its construction.

3. Endless Love is the name of a popular South Korean T.V drama. Harry is humming the theme song. The link for the song can be found in my profile, 4. Gom Se Mari popular Child’s song in South Korea, link can be found in my profile, 5. The Blessed are made up based off of a Korean creation myth, and the general mythos of bear shape-shifters in other cultures and fantasy stories, 6. Haejangguk refers to all kinds of guk or soup eaten as a hangover cure in Korean cuisine. It means “soup to chase a hangover” a version of it, Seonjiguk, includes sliced congealed ox. It is a soup with a long history and some versions of the soup is believed to have been eaten by commoners and some other variation also by high officials.-information from Wikipedia and other sources, 7. Kimchi is a traditional fermented Korean side dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings. It is often described as spicy and sour. It is often fermented for months in underground jars sourced from various sources such as radish, cucumber, and cabbage. It is the most commonly consumed food in Korea. Information from Wikipedia, cooking recipes, and brought to my attention by Of Stories Told, a reader of this story (thanks!), 8. This is based off a creation myth of a bear that was turned into a woman and gave birth to the man believed by some to have founded Korea. I altered the story a bit (the addition of twins) for the sake of the story to create an origin for the Blessed. The information was found in Wikipedia and "The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures", 9. The bracelet is inspired by various devices in various science fiction and fantasy stories and comics used to close access the wearer from their abilities. Harry able to use his Omnilingualism is left unexplained, though I attribute it to the fact that it was a gift from a god, and while a part of his magic, is singularly different from what the creators of the bracelet might have been thinking of when creating something to block a magic user from his power.
The Boy and The Conspiracies.

Chapter Notes

AN: By this point, I won't always say when Harry leaves his little peach tree surprise behind him, so just assume that he is always keeping his promise when he leaves someplace (city, village, camp).

AN 2: this chapter contains various small encounters and experiences throughout Harry's time in the Philippines, vaguely drabblish in nature from one moment to the next. You can skip some if you want, I know a few of you aren't partial to these chaps, just make sure to read the last location as it might have relevance later.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May 31, Harry is age 11, last day in South Korea and in transit out of the country...

Harry decided on his last day staying in South Korea, as he observed an airport in Muan, he was going to try out flying the Normal way for once, just to see what it is like, after all, he had nearly been beamed by them so many times now, that he might as well experience it from the inside of his potential death dealer.

So Harry found a tattoo and piercing place that was willing to overlook his age when he handed them enough money, and had his ears pierced.

When it was done, he carefully replaced the studs, putting them away for later, with the Nomgad Earrings which he remembered as having the power to induce disinterest in all those who happen to look at the wearer of the earrings until they are removed.

Harry personally wasn't a fan of the ostentatious hoops of silver with runic symbols and rubies etched throughout, uncomfortable with the weight dragging on his irritated, newly pierced ears (one of the reasons he hadn't worn them before) but they did get the job done as he was able to stroll right through Muan International Airport (1), onto the first boarding plane he could find, and recline in First class with a tuna sandwich on the way to the Philippines.

Harry spent the long flight catching up on his reading, and was relieved that he had grabbed random selection of travel magazines on his nervous plow through the airport, one of which was on his destination, turning to the appropriate page and began to read:

"The Philippines is a beautiful island country in the Southeastern area of Asia and the third largest English speaking country in the world. It has a rich history combining Asian, European, and American influences, and consists of over 7,107 islands!..." (2)

Harry hummed thoughtfully to himself. That's a lot of islands to explore and there was likely one that was deserted enough to hide away and practice his magic, he continued to read.

"...these islands are sorted under three main geographical divisions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao."

Harry thought that he might be headed for Luzon, from what he remembered from the boarding sign.
Harry turned the pages until he found information on Luzon.

"…Luzon is the largest as well as the most populated island in the Philippines and is located in the northernmost region and is the economic and political center of the nation, as well as being home to the country's capital city, Manila …"

He nodded to himself, Manila was another word he remembered from the boarding gate. The capital wasn't a bad place to start.

He tossed the magazine back into his bag and settled in with a stack of comic books and a walk-man attached to his adorned ears.

Ooo ooo ooo

June 1, Manila in the Philippines… (3)

The capital known as Manila, Harry soon came to notice, is a combination of an old world charm, shanty town abundance and areas of high rise excess existing together.

The place was filled with buildings that could be a decade to over 400 years old vying for space and the peoples moved through the streets in a sort of orderly chaos that Harry couldn't make much sense of, but was cautious to stick close to those who looked like they knew what they were doing.

The city of Manila is located on the eastern shore of Manila Bay, where Harry had claimed an isolated part out of the way of locals and tourists alike, and after quickly setting up camp, he had grabbed a poncho, in case he was caught up in one of the short but heavy periods of rain that were common this time of year during the Philippine's rainy season, and decided to explore.

During his time in Manila he took photos and sketched the Manila Bay area skyline, visited the Rizal Monument, had a Halo-Halo in front of the Gate of Fort Santiago, snuck around in the dead of night at Malacañang Palace, and spent a day sitting by a fountain at the Quiapo Church doing a slower, more thoughtful drawing of the 400 or so year old site.

Harry was especially fond of the street markets, particularly in the Intramuros District, a walled district that is the oldest in Manila and considered the historic core of the capital.

Because the Philippines had been invaded or otherwise occupied by various different countries during its history, such as the Chinese, the Malay, the Muslims, and the Spanish (the source for the country's name, after a King Philip), and America, things like rice, coco and other imports were brought in and affected the local staples.

Harry's new favorite breakfast was a porridge called Champorado, which is rice porridge with coco and condensed milk eaten with a salted fish called tuyo that is similar to sardines. Harry enjoyed the combination and made sure to buy himself the supplies needed to make his new favorite breakfast once he had learned to properly prepare everything (a lesson that was quick to be given after he offered a good junk of money to the friendly stall keeper that had given him his first bowl).

Philippine cuisine is characterized by using bold various combinations of sweet, sour and salty, like the champorado for example which has sweet and salty. As well as not wasting anything. Harry had the interesting experience of eating the head (referred to as the helmet), the intestines, bladders, feet, backside, blood, etc. of a chicken, dipped in a light sauce and BBQ'd and put on sticks. The helmet was actually not bad once one got over eating something with a face.

Harry was eager to learn it all!
June 16, Marikina, Philippines...

Harry had eventually moved on, after a couple of weeks, and into exploring the rest of the greater Metro Manila (Manila the city being one of a group that makes up the Metro) and had settled in Marikina for a time.

Marikina is considered the Shoe Capital of the Philippines, the production centre of 70% of the shoes in the country, taking the time to visit the famous Shoe Museum, and while he was never overly concerned about wearing shoes half the time unless he had to, was wearing through his current token towards footwear, so he had himself a pair of sneakers made based of a pair he saw from the notorious Iron Butterfly's collection, even if the collection is considered a symbol by some of an evil regime. (4)

Harry found a small park just outside the city proper and to paint a nearby calumpang tree, which was currently heavy with fruit/nuts. (5)

Harry usually preferred drawing but he thought it might be interesting to expand his mediums a bit, so he had bought a small water color set from a teenager who had a table set up nearby a table where Harry had been experimenting eating live shrimp in spicy vinegar and had decided, why not after the little buggers finished scrambling in death throes down his esophagus. (6)

The tree had lovely sprawling branches with bright green leaves and reddish fruit/nuts (Harry wasn't exactly sure which).

Harry was painting, a white kerchief pulled down his forehead and partially over his hair to protect him from the sun and so intent on his work that he almost didn't notice the man who burst through the bushes.

"By Jove, this is the last time I wear silk in this climate!"

Harry stared as a rather large man with a prominent bald spot, a shirt of periwinkle blue that did indeed look like silk and was tight over a prominent belly, finishing off with a set of powder blue bell bottoms.

He was obviously English, and obviously unused to not only dressing for the climate, but dressing with any sense at all, man. (7)

Harry was not exactly the fashion police, but even he understood bad dressing.

The man unshouldered a canvas stool, setting it up at the foot of the tree he had been painting, and plopped himself down, fanning himself with his map. It was around then that he noticed a bemused Harry.

"Goodness lad! Gave me a bit of a start! Didn't see you there!" he patted his chest, "children shouldn't be sitting around all quiet-like at your age."

Harry sighed and moved his things so the man wasn't in his line of sight.

"Oh, a painter I see," the man chortled, "well I suppose a little introspection can be forgiven for the creative mind…mind if I see? I enjoy a little scribble here and there. Knew this fascinating chap who does amazing work with landscapes, all the rage with purebloods currently, always remembers to send me invitations to his latest shows."
Since Harry was not likely to be left alone any time soon, he sighed and turned the watercolour pad of paper around.

"Goodness! Not bad my boy! Not bad!" a disturbing glint was shot his way, it suddenly reminded him of Anansi when the spider god talked about stories for some reason, "it's a shame you're not of my lot, you could have really done something with this talent of yours, ah well."

"Er, thanks," Harry replied, unsure if he had bene insulted or not and making sure to keep a healthy distance as far as politeness allowed in case he needed to make a dash for it.

The man brightened at the sound of his voice, "a fellow Englishmen! Grand! The names Horace Slughorn by the way, I suspect your here vacationing with your family then? Yes, well best be getting on with it," he paused, giving Harry a sly look, "a strong strapping chap such as you wouldn't mind doing a fellow countrymen whose old legs are a bit weak a favor?" (8)

Harry, who had not been able to get a word in edgewise, gave a shrug.

Taking that as a yes, the man gestured to a cloth sack sitting beside him.

"I came all this way to gather some of those you see," he gestured at the red fruit/nuts above them, "I'm into po...er, natural medicine, and they are particularly good for some of my mixtures. Has to be picked fresh mind, and particularly good picked by single women, particularly virgin single women over the age of 16…but what can you do? Though you look young enough to still be a virgin and single as well, half as good I suppose…" (5)

Red flag up, Harry grabbed his satchel, leaving his art things strewn about and ran for all he was worth.

Slughorn frowned, pulling out his wand now that he was alone and directed it towards the tree. With a muttered spell and a levitation charm, he had what he wanted in the bottomless basket.

"Kids these days, so excitable! Ah well, these are still somewhat useful I suppose, even if a single virgin didn't pick them."

Ooo ooo ooo

June 18, Capiz Province, Philippines...

Harry was strolling through a town in the Capiz province in the Visayas district, carrying an armful of laundry to a local laundry mat, when a sock happened to fall out of his laundry bag. Harry had bent down to retrieve the errant item, when he heard a tik-tik sound coming from behind him. Curious, he happened to look between his legs and beheld a tall thin creature in the vague shape of an anthromorphic canine with what looked like a long butterfly tongue dangling to the creatures thin feet.

Harry yelped, standing up and whirling around, but all he saw was a little old woman seating at a table selling candles.

She gave him a curious look, and Harry hastily turned around, heart pounding, and decided that his laundry could wait for the next town.

Before he left though, Harry hastily went to the nearest table and bout a bracelet of orange and black beads, rather thankful he had stopped to listen to old tales in his travels. (9)

Ooo ooo ooo
June 23, Bulacan Province, Philippines…

Harry was practicing with a kubing as he flew high through Northern Philippines one morning, somewhere in the central Luzon district on Luzon Island and decided to stop for some lunch in a forested area in the Bulacan province. (10)

Harry put away his kubing and pulled out one of his preservation jars which were filled with the Adobo he had made last evening and a bottle of Royal Tru-grape, and a fork. (11)(12)

Harry settled in to gorge.

As he ate, he pulled out a book he had picked up in Manila titled *Travels Through Philippine* and after surveying the well detailed map included, Harry determined that the buildings he had seen not too far from his current location was the training grounds for The Scout Ranger Elite. (13)(14)

Harry was admittedly curious. He had actually seen a few military training camps in various countries during his travels, though he had never really stuck around long enough to properly observe. According to the book, this military group was supposed to be some of the best, and their training rather grueling.

Harry shrugged. He had nothing really better to do.

To be cautious though, since it was a military facility, he put on those blasted enchanted earrings (the piercings in his ears long healed by this point, though he always had to keep the studs in on the holes grew over quickly) and found a good vantage spot hovering over a group of what looked like new initiates.

He pulled out his book.

"… volunteers for Scout Rangers are usually already trained soldiers from other army regiments. Upon arrival they will be divested of their ranks so that they all begin as equals."

Harry observed these new recruits as for the next five hours they were put through the most grueling exercise possible.

Harry raised his eyebrows. According to his book, the first five hours during something called Reception, they were put through hard physical challenge to wear them down, and likely wheedle out those who may not be yet up to scratch in the very beginning.

The fact that it was close to 30c without a cloud in the sky or any sort of breeze added an extra touch of unfortunate to the sweating men below.

Harry saw four men in the first 10 minutes or so alone fall victim to heat exhaustion, one of which had to be taken away by ambulance.

Harry was suddenly profoundly grateful that he never had aspirations for the military. As fit as he was, he didn't think he could have had the strength to do what these men were doing.

Interested to see how many would make it, Harry stuck around to watch.

During the second run, more soldiers were taken away.

One soldier, Harry noticed, had such a severe case of heat stroke that medics were attempting to cool off his body as soon as he was loaded into the ambulance.
Harry felt rather sorry for the poor bloke, so taking advantage of the fact that no one could notice him, he landed near by the hubbub, took out on the peaches he had kept from one of the trees he had planted since being in the Philippines and cut pieces of the juicy reddish-gold fruit and put them into a bottle of water, shaking it.

When he was done, while hands were busy bathing the man's upper torso with cold cloths, Harry placed a hand under the senseless man's neck and carefully fed him the drink.

In a matter of minutes, the medics were surprised when the man suddenly sat bolt upright, perfectly fine.

The man gave his thanks, and rather shocked himself at his recovery and sudden sense of boundless health, good will, and energy, thanked god, and went to catch up with the others.

Harry returned to hovering over the volunteers, always impressed with the kick those peaches had.

After those runs, the recruits then were required to get onto their bellies and crawl through grass and mud for some distance as fast as they were able, vaguely reminding Harry of snakes. The man that Harry had helped was still going strong and was actually slightly ahead of the pack.

Then they did things like rolling by grabbing onto partners ankles, jump squats, and leaning on their heads for extended periods.

A few more dropped from exhaustion and were carted away.

Finally, in the end, those left were lined up for the final phase of Reception.

One by one, all the men took turns as they kneeled on the ground and were spoon fed heaps pf mashed chilli's as well as forced to drink the juices. They were not allowed to spit it out and had to swallow all of it.

Harry grimaced in sympathy. He was fine with a bit of space here and there, but was not overly partial too much. Watching these men struggle with this…meal, Harry knew he would now never be able to look at chilli peppers the same way again.

Then those who had managed that went over to pay homage to a statue of a black panther sitting on a plinth with a coat of arms of a red rimmed shield with a sword or dagger in the centre, the insignia of the scout rangers called the tabak.

According to Harry's book, the red border of the tabak signifies the blood, sweat, and tears shed by every ranger during their course and the sword symbolizes their special unit capability of being able to go anywhere, any place at any time with the words "we strike" for emphasis.

Out of the 200 plus volunteers that had started out in the beginning, 33 hadn't made it.

Harry eventually continued on, but had a whole new respect for the term perseverance.

Ooo ooo ooo

June 27, A Small City, Philippines...

Marcel Leon was a man who enjoyed the finer things in life. He had been raised in a respectable middle class family in Arkansas, was mildly good at athletics but not enough to get him anywhere other than a slightly healthier body, and had studied for years to become the best Defense Attorney that money could buy.
He was not overly attractive, but kept fit enough and decently put together. His partner, a history teacher, Juan, who was also well put together and decently fit, though perhaps enjoyed t-shirts a bit more than Marcel, but he looked good in them, so he didn't complain.

He was not a bad man, nor was he a saint, just a morally average individual who got on with things.

Eventually, as retirement approached, and he had less and less cases, and more and more grey hairs, he entered a bit of later life crisis (much like a mid-life crisis, but in ones later 60's). His partner, seeing the signs, encouraged him to get a hobby.

That is what Marcel did.

Bird watching became his great passion and when he was handed his complimentary gold watch and clock at his retirement ceremony, he had already seen every bird that Arkansas had to offer and was already planning a trip to Washington.

During his Bird watching, he came across other aficionados and discovered Bird Watching Bingo. The point of the sport is that one is given a list of random species of bird, an international list, and they are required to find, check off, and take a picture of the bird, and then send it into headquarters where you would get another list and a badge proclaiming your ranking within the Bird Bingo Club. (15)

Marcel was currently in the top three in second place.

Marcel was going to get the number one title from that smug Linda McStrudal, the current champion of the past 7 lists, and when he got his tasteful royal blue satin and plastic badge, he was going to rub that gloating woman's face in it.

Much to his partner's delight, Marcel had surprised Juan with tickets to the Philippines as a 20th anniversary present. While Juan was perusing the local bookstores and museums, Marcel had settled in to find the last 3 birds on his bingo sheet.

He had so far found the Red-Footed Booby, and the Oriental Darter much more quickly than he had estimated. (16)

Now, he was so close he could taste his victory!

He had rented a boat and motored to an area along a small fresh water lake that the local who had rented him the boat had told him his last target, a Grebe, could be sighted.

He sat in that boat for hours until finally the object of his desire paddled out into the water directly in front of him.

He cackled to himself as he pulled out his bird bingo sheet and, with a flourish of his expensive shinny blue pen, he crossed Grebes off his list.

One quick glance through his binoculars to ensure that the bird seemed disinclined to go anywhere, and he quickly, but not non-threateningly, grabbed his expensive telephoto-lensed camera and settled the view finder to his eye.

He was just adjusting the focus on the content bird when suddenly, a hand shot out of the water next to the bird, making the creature squawk in statement, and grabbed the grebe around it's long neck and drag it, struggling under the water.

The bird didn't surface, not as much as a feather.
Marcel stared at the spot for several stunned blinks, before he practically threw the camera back into its bag, and smacked the edge of his boat several times, cussing a blue streak as he realized that he would have to wait for another grebe to appear, and he was already out of time!

By the time the man had found another grebe, two days later, McStrudal (whose list had taken the woman to Canada) had already secured her position at the top in Bird Bingo yet again.

Meanwhile...

Harry licked his lips as he continued to turn the handle of his new roasting spit, occasionally running a stick with banana leaves attached on one end, dipped in a solution of coconut vinegar and garlic over the delightfully golden-browning carcass of some water fowl he had caught earlier while he had been underwater in some lake observing the local fresh water fish while Bubbling.

He had been looking for an excuse to use his new cooking utensil. Sure it was for roasting a pig usually, but he found that it worked just as well for...he paused, looking at his rotating dinner, whatever type of bird it was.

Now, where did he put his basil?

Ooo ooo ooo

June 30, Balabac Islands, Philippines...

Harry was hiking though a smaller inlet that was part of the Balabac islands looking for a nice out of the way spot to set up camp when he came across what had to be the largest pig he had ever seen.

He had seen wild pigs and boars during his travels so far, the Philippines alone had at least 4 different varieties of wild pig, and some rather tasty, but he could safely admit that this fellow took the cake!

He stood roughly 5 feet from the tip of his ear to the bottom of his thick dark front hooves, and at least 7 feet long from snout to tail.

It had rough bristly short fur along its bodies in bands of green, yellow, and brown, dainty dark curled tusks, like a silent movie era villain, and round reddish brown eyes.

The two observed each other for a moment, before the pig gave a somewhat irritated tail flick then charged in a mass of affronted squealing.

Harry immediately took to the air, and observed the creature further, wondering if he should sketch it, or maybe take a picture as it was an impressive animal.

The oinker skidded to a stop in surprise, and then looked straight up at him.

Then it stood up on its hind legs and called out in clear English.

"Excuse me, but what sort of bird are you exactly?"

Harry nearly fell out of the sky in surprise.

Harry made to fly off. Talking giant pigs was not a good sign for his day.

"Oh now don't be like that," the pig called after him, "I didn't mean any harm, do come back."

Harry paused in his retreat, looking behind him wearily and found that the creature did seem to look
apologetic, at least he thought it might be an apologetic look, this being his first experience talking to a pig.

Harry moved a little closer, but remained ready to book it in case the talking pig did something shifty.

The newest Abnormal encounter to be added to his list, was by far the most normal encounter for Harry.

The pig, seeing that Harry was open to conversation had gotten up and began walking around on his hind legs, looking quite comfortable with that fact and was lead to a comfy looking cottage some 10 minutes away, settled between the hollow of two trees that had grown conjoined to each other.

There were chickens pecking around the grounds, a heard of goats that looked at Harry balefully at their approach but otherwise ignored them.

An askal, a breed of one of the more common street dogs of the Philippines came running from around the back and barked at Harry before the pig scolded the dog, but patted his head in a reassuring manner and sent the canine on his way with what looked like cubes of boneless dried fish sitting just inside his door way. (17)

Seeing the obvious invite and feeling rather foolish now remaining tense with the obvious politeness and welcome directed his way, he landed on his feet but didn't follow the creature inside.

His host understood and with a whistle, a table, two chairs, and a cart with a set of finger sandwiches and a jug of lemonade came outside and settled in front of the cottage, with two mugs following in the rear.

Harry took the offered seat, and had the bemusing experiencing of enjoying a rather nice brunch as the two chatted.

"Imagine my surprise when instead of yet another human trespasser, I find some sort of odd bird instead!" the good pig fellow exclaimed as he took a sip of his drink, smacking his snout agreeably.

Harry sniffed his drink and took a careful sip himself and other then it being a bit more sour then he was used to, it was quite delicious.

"I'm not a bird," Harry corrected.

"Now that's what I thought at first myself," the pig grunted to himself, reaching for a sandwich and taking a nibble as he thought, "though a foreigner most likely, considering your look, but human's, not even little boys, can fly in the manner I just witnessed, and you are certainly no Aswang or any of the other shapeshifters, this area is far too remote for their lot and I would have smelled one a mile off anyway."

Harry took a few bites of his sandwich, some sort of bean paste mixed with wild onion that was actually pretty tasty. (18)

He felt comfortable enough to ask his own questions by this point.
"If you don’t mind me asking, why did you try to attack me anyway?"

"Attack?" the pig looked scandalized, "that's barbaric! No! Merely scare, I would never actually physically harm someone if I could help it. Occasionally humans like to try to encroach on my bit of land. Not often, but sometimes, and it becomes a further and further necessity to scare them off. The magic that once protected my inlet from their encroachment is a bit old you see. It was magic that was set up by a shaman of my kind just before the Spaniards arrived. There are other places like this of course, and there are others such as myself, but with the encroachment of human population and industry and agriculture over the years, we've had to spread ourselves thinner and thinner, to the point where there are so few of us left that we have quite forgot how to cast such powerful magic when our Shamans disappeared."

The pig sighed, nibbling on his sandwich.

"Oh, that's harsh," Harry said sympathetically, then "can I ask, um, what exactly are you, how is it that you can speak English if your so isolated? And what sort of magic is this?" he tapped the table.

"Well, you're a curious creature aren't you? I do appreciate a thing with a good head on his shoulders!" the pig chuckled to himself, "to answer your questions, my kind are called Cafre, I am able to speak to you thus, English is it called? Interesting name, because my kind have the ability to understand and speak the tongues of any sentient creature we come across, a friend of mine also speaks your language, and through him I grasped it first, though he never bothered to mention what it was called. As for the table and the tableware and such, is a simple locomotion enchantment that is one of the few magic's that is left to my kind." (19)

The pig, whose name was introduced (with apologies for the bad manners for not saying so earlier) as Lurl.

They were in the middle of debating the merits of onions when a third visitor arrived.

A beautiful bright green Parrot with teal tipped wing feathers and a sea blue cape of feathers on its head flew in and landed on a tree branch and squawked at them, looking quite incensed.

"Oh do not look so frustrated Ferdis, here," Lurl gestured behind him and an ornately carved wooden bird perch trundled outside and settled on the other side of the table.

A small clay bowl with slices of fruit and sandwich settled itself into a cup holder on the perch with some water.

The bird squawked again and turned his beak towards Harry then upwards. Harry had the sudden impression that the parrot was flipping him off somehow.

"Now don't be rude Ferdis, really! Do you think that I have taken leave of my senses and just invited some human child for brunch? Ple-ease!" Lurl snorted disdainfully, "

The parrot gave the pig a look that seemed to imply that he had, but after a time, gave a put upon sigh and took the offered perch.

"There's a good chap," Lurl said, "now, introductions are in order. Harry, this is my good friend of several years, Ferdis, comes all the way from Thailand to spend a season with me, he tends to be a bit ill-tempered from the flying you see," the parrot gave an indignant huff, "Ferids, this is Harry Potter a bird of some sort in the guise of a human who says he's not a bird, but can fly anyway and knows some marvelous things you can do with onions!...now none of that sulking," Lurl chided, "don't be rude and introduce yourself," then aside to Harry, "my friend tells the most wonderful
Ferdis seemed to have reached his tolerance point for suddenly he said "of course he's not a bird you pizza topping with legs!" the bird berated, "look at him! He's got no feathers! No beak! Of course he looks human! He IS Human! Imbecile! And you just outed me!"

Harry stared at the parrot as it paced up and down its perch.

"But humans can't fly," Lurl argued back stubbornly, ignoring the last part.

"Of course they can!" the bird snapped back, "I told you about this! Planes! Hang gliders! Helicopters!"

Now it was Lurl's turn to be affronted, "of course I remember Ferdis, I'm no soft sculled ninny! I meant that the boy himself can fly!"

The bird turned its beady black eyes on Harry, pinning him under his gaze like a bug.

"Well, up with you then, let's see you fly without your death machines."

Harry glowered at the parrot, somewhat over the surprise of seeing a parrot speak in intelligible sentences outside of "polly wanna cracker" style of speech by this point.

It had been Harry's experience that it was best not to upset people, whether normal or abnormal, if he could avoid it, so he wiped his fingers on the provided napkin, pushed his chair back, and rose into the air about 10 feet.

The bird let out a startled squawk, making Harry smirk, served the git right for the dirty looks.

The bird flew around Harry, obviously looking for some device or method by which Harry was accomplishing this.

The bird hummed then retook his perch, and Harry took that as his queue as well and returned to his seat and picked up his drink.

"Well, alright, maybe he isn't a human, he still looks like one though."

"Maybe his wings and feathers are invisible?" suggested Lurl.

The parrot huffed, still giving Harry the stink eye, "suppose."

"If it makes you feel better, I've been told that if I ever step foot in Antarctica I'll turn into a penguin," he conceded reluctantly. (20)

The parrot huffed, "those feathered fish eaters can't fly...though I suppose a little bit bird is a step up, and means I don't have to kill you."

After awkward titters all around, though Harry was left with the distinct impression that the parrot had not been kidding, talk soon degenerated into idle chit-chat before Harry got up the nerve to ask the prickly bird what exactly he was.

"What do I look like to you? A frog?" Ferdis snarked.

"Um, well, you look like a parrot actually," Harry replied, not offended by this point.

The birds snorted in a very un-birdlike manner.
"Of course I'm a parrot you knit brain!," the bird's feathers ruffled in annoyance.

"Um…" was Harry's intelligent reply.

"I think what the boy means, is how you are conversing as wittily as you are my friend," Lurl cut in.

The bird stuck his beak in the air, but after a bowl of pineapple cubes was passed his way, he grudgingly explained.

"Nearly all parrots are much more intelligent than humans and other sentient creatures think," the bird huffed, "though I, of course, am a bit above the rest of the flock."

Harry took this in. then he realized that what he had assumed were normal, mundane animals, were in fact secretly as intelligent as any human!

"…Not that Humans are allowed to know of course, the only reason I am even speaking in front of you is because your obviously some sort of bird at least, despite your horrible taste in appearance, and the fact that blabbermouth over there compromised me," he shot a glare at Lurl who shrugged around another finger sandwich.

"But why don't you talk to humans?" Harry asked curiously.

The bird ruffled his feathers agitatedly, but sullenly explained:

"It was a very long, long time ago," Ferdis took a quick gulp of water before continuing, seeming resigned.

"…In ancient times, it was not the parrot which first roosted in the human's home that was not for the purpose of their food, it was another bird called the Lorikeet. They thought this bird rather grand, as humans thought that they could teach it to make sounds in a way that they do.

This, of course, was a guise that the Lorikeet wore so as not to intimidate humans with their greater intelligence, because a human was still rather simple and chick-like in those times so, like with any chick, Lorikeets believed that they should amuse humans by making them think that they were smart enough to teach another being to speak as a way to encourage their co-operation. At the same time, the Lorikeets benefited from man, for while they were rather simple at times, they did utilize sturdy shelters and gather enough food in excess to feed an entire flock throughout a season, so they were at least useful…"

Ferdis paused to spear a tangerine slice onto a talon and nibbled it with his beak.

"… There were a group of Lorikeets in one village though that thought that Humans were wiser then they gave them credit, so while they continued with the game, they decided to share their own thoughts and ideas with humans as well.

" This seemed to work for a time, both delighted with one another, but then one day, a farmer in a village that one of these Lorikeets dwelled with happened to have a buffalo wander into his rice field.

" Now the farmer knew very well that this bovine, a truly stupid creature in my opinion, belonged to his neighbour. Despite this, the farmer killed it anyway and prepared the meat, eating some of it and hiding the rest of it away on top of the rice house.

" Not too much later, the neighbour did come around and asked the farmer if he happened to see his animal. The farmer claimed to have not seen his buffalo. Before the farmer could leave however, the honest lorikeet told the neighbour that the farmer had taken his buffalo, killed it, and ate and stored
"The neighbour found the meat where the bird said it was, but the farmer proclaimed that the meat was already his and the spot where he always stored his meat.

"The neighbour didn't know who to believe, the bird or the farmer, so the matter was brought before the human's council of law at the time.

"The evening before the day of the trial, the farmer was feeling rather incensed that his word should be questioned over that of a bird, displaying that common human quality of prejudice of "like with like", so he took the poor lorikeet and put him in a brass jar and covered the jar with a cloth so that no light can get inside. It was clear evening that night and the full moon was out but it was completely dark for the poor lorikeet in that pot, who was unaware of the current weather because of this, an ignorance for which is what the despicable farmer was after.

"All night he banged carefully on the pot to simulate thunder and sprinkled water on the cloth to simulate rain.

"When the day of the trial came, the Lorikeet was removed from the jar, and he and the farmer attended the trial.

"During the trial, the neighbour testified to what the Lorikeet had told him and how he had found the meat right where he had claimed it was.

"The lorikeet was then made to repeat what he had said to the neighbour, which he did.

"Then the farmer gave his testimony and claimed that it was the meat of another animal that was stored there, then he enacted his treachery upon his former winged companion and asked the judge presiding over the proceedings, "how can you take the word of this bird over that of your neighbour?"

"The judge did point out the obvious that the Lorikeet was indeed intelligent, and thus likely to be telling the truth because he knew enough to tell a deceitful act was taking place. The farmer replied that the bird spoke nonsense more than truth, no matter the conversationalist, and that he could prove this.

"So he asked the judge and the neighbour to remember how the weather was the night before. The two nodded, remembering how nice and clear it was outside.

"Then the farmer turned to the bird and asked him how the weather was that night.

"The Lorikeet replied that the weather had been horrid, raining and thundering all night.

"The judge hearing this was convinced after that nonsense sounding reply, and the farmer was proclaimed innocent.

In those times, such a crime as stealing a neighbour's livestock could be punished by death, and the judge was not happy that a seeming witless testimony from a bird had nearly cost them a seemingly innocent man's life.

"So the Lorikeet was expelled into the forest, along with his fellows, tending to their own needs and such.

"Eventually humans versed in the ways of magic who wished to hide all manner of what they considered magical or unusual swept through the country and found out about the rumours of
Lorikeets that had once spoken as humans do. They thought Lorikeets magical, but could find no outright evidence of it, so deciding to be safe, thus they cast great magic to take the memory of the Lorikeets speech from the minds of humans and then cast a spell on all Lorikeets that made them unable to speak to humans as they once had, making their minds stupid in the presence of humans, leaving the mindless echo of words, like the games they once played.

"Then one day, my kind came to the Lorikeet's forests, and looked with interest upon humans and there shelters and abundance of food. And we thought to ourselves that it would be grand to live in harmony with humans and share in the food and warmth of fires and companionship.

"The Lorikeets, upon hearing of this, warned my kind, telling us the story of their relationship to humans and what humans were like, and the spell that made them mindless in man's presence.

"My kind were determined to still try, but we took heed of the warnings, and instead played the games of the Lorikeets with humans, but never let on that we were more intelligent then they.

That is how things have been since." (21)

There was silence as Harry digested the story, and his sandwiches, before saying "so all those studies done on parrots to determine their intelligence…"

"Complete fabrications on part of those who sacrificed their sanity, time and lives to keep the secret alive," Ferdis nodded gravely.

"Wow," Harry exclaimed, impressed by the sheer scope of the conspiracy,

"What other birds are like parrots and Lorikeets?" He asked wearily, feeling ill at the notion he might have accidently eaten something that was sentient.

"Very few," the Parrot reassured, obviously catching on to Harry's worry, giving him a disproving huff, "even birds have their evolutionary version of monkeys."

After that, the conversation which included a list of birds for Harry to avoid eating, it changed to Ferdis' flight from Thailand, messages from a few other of Lurl's kind and so forth.

Eventually, a fascinating as this all was, Harry decided to end his visit.

He promised his new friends that he would comeback someday and solemnly promise to Ferdis to not reveal the secret of the parrots or the tragic fate of the Lorikeet.

Ferdis didn't seem reassured until Harry thought it was only fair to give him a secret in return, so he turned himself into a bear then back…then quickly got dressed in a set of cloths again, grumbling about not being able to keep his cloths and how that was his second favorite pants.

Both creatures were rather startled at this, and the presence of Harry's tail, which had been hidden before hand down his pant leg, placated Ferdis further. A secret for a secret Harry said. A Flying boy with a tail who can turn into a bear should be more than enough reassurance.

Before he left, he asked Lurl if he was inclined to peaches. Lurl had never had a peach before, though Ferdis had, and was partial to them, so Harry pulled out one of his peach pits and tossed it onto the ground on the edge of Lurl's property.

"There," Harry proclaimed, "all the peaches you could want. There really good, thanks for the sandwiches!"
Goodbyes and promises to one day return exchanged, Harry took to the air and moved on to his next destination.

Chapter End Notes

1. International Airport exists, and let’s pretend it has a flight to the Philippines if it doesn’t, 2. The information about the Philippines comes from Wikipedia, and itsmorefuninthephilippines.com, 3. Information on Manila, including the food, is from Wikipedia, a short travel log vid, and Street Food Around the World: Manila, Philippines the link of which can be found on my profile, 4. The iron Butterfly, also known as Imelda Marcos, was the widow of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos best known for her collection of some three thousand pairs of shoes which was donated to the shoe museum when she was sent from the country, and served as First Lady from 1965 to 1986. In 1983, the Marcos government was accused of being involved in the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr.. This led to elections in 1986, after which Aquino’s widow, Corazon, accused the Marcos family of manipulating the results in their favor. The people protested and forced the Marcos couple out of office and into exile. Not to mention the martial law that lasted from 1971 to 1982- Wikipedia, 5. Actual tree that was associated with the goddess Ginoong Ganay, translated roughly into Unmarried Lady who was believed to inhabit the "calumpang tree" and was the advocate of single women. Her presence in the tree was heralded by the fact that it's pretty flowers drove away their insect suitors by releasing a rank scent (though there was not mention that the women had to be virgins, that's my addition). This is the myth that inspired the best source to obtain the fruit/nut form the tree that Slughorn, though obviously not Harry, as a potion master knows, 6. Harry was eating an actual dish that is eaten in this country was featured on Street Food Around the World: Manila, Phillipines, 7. In HP canon, many wizards, particularly purebloods, have no idea how to properly dress like muggles, I choose to believe that Slughorn is similar, 8. Horace Slughorn is the retired Potions professor form the HP cannon who taught before Snape came along. He was well known for recognizing talent and potential and has been compared to a spider a time or to in his methods of collecting people, 9. Harry encountered a popular folklore creature known as an Ashwang a type of shape shifter of the ghoul/vampire/werewolf variety. The myth of the aswang is well known throughout the Philippines, and has many stories and variations tied to its existence. In one version, some of the ways to know if one is near an Ashwang is the tik-tik noise it makes when hunting, and if you bend down and look between your legs, a disguised ashwag (usually in the body of an already deceased person) , will be revealed, orange and black beads worn as a bracelet, normally for newborns, is considered one of the effective methods of repelling them, 10. Kubuntu is a type of Philippine jaw harp from bamboo and is traditionally considered an intimate instrument, usually used as communication between family or a loved one in close quarters, 11. Adobo is a common dish in the Philippines that was mentioned on the show BBC 2015: Food Journey in Philippines a link for which can be found on my profile, 12. The drink is a local Philippine drink from the Royal-Tru brand that was eventually taken over by the coca-cola company and is band from the US, 13. The title of the book was made up, and the passage Harry read was information from a Documentary called Scout Ranger Elite Philippine Training, 14. The Scout Ranger Elite actually do exist, and the depiction of the 5 hour Reception did actually happen, the events of which are shown in Scout Ranger Elite Philippine Training which goes into excellent detail of what these volunteers have to go through, 15. I don’t know if there is
an actual Bird Bingo Club, I got the idea from the Disney movie The Emperor's New Groove, one of the antagonist's Kronk, was into it, 16. Species of bird in the Philippines, including the later mentioned Grebe, 17. this is an actual breed of dog common to urban settings of the Philippines, I made up for plot convenience and because I was feeling too lazy by this point to look up local fare, though Filipinos tend to favor garlic quite a lot and beans as well, 19. Cafre are from Filipino folklore and are a type of pig-like creature that has the ability to talk and walk upright like a human. From The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures, 20. Harkening back to the chap where Harry gains the Happyfeet power and/or while he was in The Vault, and was told by Rhubarb that if he ever went to Antarctica he would turn into a penguin until he set foot on land in another country, 21. This story is a combination of things I made up for plot convenience and the story "Why the Parrot Repeats Man's Words" from Best Loved Folktales of the World. it is a folktale from Thailand.
Chapter Notes

This is a missing chap that I forgot to post after chap 21 at fanfiction.net.

In transit, Somewhere around the Spratly Islands between the Philippines and Vietnam…

Harry let out a sigh of relief as he landed on a narrow patch of atoll, the South China Sea occasionally lapping at his toes as he pulled out a simple purple fan, snapped it open and fanned himself while he waited for his heart rate to get back to normal.

Harry had been able to see the whites of the co-pilot eyes on that one. He sighed, maybe he should have snuck onto one of those cruise ships that sailed along the South China Sea, and one of them was bound to have been heading for Vietnam.

He shrugged, slipping his fan away, already over the scare, having had so many encounters with commercial airliners by this point that the shock of it lasted less and less (though an influx in urban legends of a flying ghost boy in the clouds increased more and more, unbeknownst to Harry).

Harry decided that while he was taking his break, he might as well do a little fishing.

The Spratlys are one of the major archipelagos in the South China Sea which is made up of more than 30,000 islands and reefs that made the area somewhat tricky for boaters in many spots to traverse through at times, despite being under a fair amount of contention in terms of boarders among some of the surrounding countries (1).

Despite this, the area is only sparsely populated here and there by a few military outposts and some civilian settlements, though not overly populated, making it an excellent place for a magical boy to stop and rest and have a spot of fun.

Harry had been planning on stopping here anyway, particularly when locals in Ramos Island, his last stop through the Philippines, talked about the abundance of different sea life ripe for the plucking if you were brave enough to try for it, though the “Dangerous Grounds” as they are referred to by the locals, tended to be mostly in the Northerly area of the islands, an area of which Harry happened to be.

As Harry settled in for a good long bout of fishing, occasionally some of the local seabirds, white crested terns which were also using the small inlet, would boldly try to chase him off, most likely seeing him as an interloper. Since these particular birds were not on his list of secretly intelligent, he supplemented some of his food supply by casually grabbing one out of the sky and breaking its neck, sending his fellows away in a flurry of feathers and squawking.

Harry cleaned his catch, setting aside the feathers and tossing the inedible portions into the sea, which had the added benefit of attracting more fish.

Once cleaned, Harry stored the fowl, caught himself a few long tailed tuna, which at 76 pounds required him to Lift it out of the water or risk snapping his fishing pole, definitely large enough see
him for a while.

After he was done and the meat was stored into preservation jars and put away along with his gear, Harry took a quick dip in the waters to cool off, laughing when a sea turtle swam around him on its ponderous journey, then continued on.

Ooo ooo ooo

_Hanoi, Vietnam…_

Harry sighed contentedly as he leaned back in his seat, an egg coffee resting in front of him.

Harry was currently enjoying his second cup of the late morning as the hustle and bustle of the city of Hanoi spread out slightly below him from his perch on the balcony section of a small out of the way little café in the heart of the city (2). Harry was not overly partial to coffee normally, but he had been curious when he had heard about it, and a local had told him that this place, whose name he had yet to learn to pronounce, let alone read, but was thankfully manned by someone who spoke a little English and some Mandarin and he was settled with his drink, enjoying the slight breeze coming off of a nearby lake (3).

Upon arrival into Hanoi, he was immediately greeted by a small, but rather concentrated rainstorm, so hadn’t had the time to find an out of the way place to shelter for his stay, so he paid for lodgings at a bathhouse that also offered rooms, and those willing to look the other way over a minor on his own if he paid enough.

Harry was currently in his second day upon arrival, and the rain was finally over and had decided to go exploring. When Harry was done his coffee, he went off to embrace what the city had to offer.

According to his information, Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam and the second largest populated city with over 6 million in the metropolitan district alone. It was an interesting balance of old and new architecture, cultural influences, as the country had been occupied by a couple of different world powers throughout history, along with a certain co-existence, to a certain degree, of nature and the urban.

Harry strolled along Long Biên Bridge that spanned the Red River that connects the two districts of Hoan Kiem and Long Bien and spent some time in the market place in Hoam Kiem, working up the nerve to try his first taste of grilled frog (4).

While he was there, he also went to the Hoam Kiem Lake and took pictures and sketched alongside other tourists and local artists the beautifully ancient Tháp Rùa or the Turtle Tower that sat serenely on a bright green grassy knoll in the middle of the lake.

He went to the Hanoi Opera house and listened to the melodies of soprano opera singer, Lê Dung performing “O mio babbino caro” from Puccini’s _Gianni Schicchi_.(5)

He went to the Perfume Pagoda, a vast complex of Buddhist temples and shrines that was built into the limestone of the Huong Tich mountains. Some of the buildings were ornate, some were colorful, some simple or, interestingly, all of the above. He visited many of the different temples such as the Phat Tich temple which is reputed to have a stone that legend says is the actual preserved footprint of Bodhisatva Quan Am, a person of significant religious importance that Harry later learned from a local devotee that the figure was a bodhisattva of compassion, and many looked to Quan Am for guidance, fertility and protection and is known by other names in other countries. Throughout his wanderings Harry would come across many of the white statues of the divine woman figure in the altars of the homes he peeked into, and along many stretches of mountainside highways throughout
Vietnam, and was careful to pay those sites and statues respect. (6).

Harry also visited another temple site called the Temple of Literature which is a Confucius temple and one of Vietnam’s first national universities. The scholar in Harry appreciated the peaceful surroundings, and even took some time to find a nice comfortable nook somewhere to read.

Harry didn’t spend all his time in contemplation though, equally taking in a few cinemas, his love for movies firmly established by this point, and watched a couple of horror movies while eating spring rolls and a bag of Shrimp Chips. After wards he would merge with crowds of excitable locals and tourist youth and visit karaoke bars, each trying to outperform the other, harry doing a rather good rendition of “Loser” that had earned him some modest cheers from his fellow strangers (7), Harry even tried his hand at bowling with the group afterwards, but was only passable at it.

On his last day in Hanoi, he finished off his stay by going to the Thăng Long Water Puppet Theater and watching with keen delight his first water puppetry show, and clapped with the rest of the tourists and locals at the end of the performance.

Ooo ooo ooo

*Somewhere in the forests of Vietnam…*

Harry frowned thoughtfully as he stared down at his map, then at his compass, then at the faded moldy crossroads sign.

Harry had been flying in circles for an hour trying to find the best route to the capital, but his usually faithful compass seemed to be failing him. He was sure he should have hit at least some sort of settlement by now.

Harry sighed with relief when he eventually spotted a barely visible overgrown road and landed to see if he could figure out where he was.

Unfortunately for him, the sign was unreadable and the overgrown crossroads did not show up on his map…if he wasn’t far off his planned route drastically that is.

Harry gave the three different methods of direction sour looks before putting away his map and compass, picking a direction through the always popular inny-meeny-miney-moe method and began to walk, the butt of his walking stick digging into the loose dirt beneath with an oddly satisfying “shuss-shuss” sound. He could just fly again, but he was worried about flying to high and missing something in all this dense wood, so walking it is.

Matters were further complicated when a deep thick fog rolled in.

As soon as the mist touched his skin, Harry had a sudden, strong sense of lethargy. He stumbled, catching himself against a tree, looking around him, then his eyes widened when he saw people in the mist…no that wasn’t right.

He squinted, struggling against the allure to just curl up on the suddenly very inviting damp leaves-No! He shook his head and pinched one of his hands viciously.

His eyes narrowed as he observed the mist surroundings him, and that’s when he realized, and his eyes widened.

There wasn’t people in the mist-The people were the mist!.

Harry had heard the stories and urban legends since his arrival, the strong belief in ghosts that existed
among the Normals, contemporary times or not. He remembered how many painted the spirits as somewhat less than amiable, even the occasional story of ghosts robbing or attacking the living.

He had a feeling that these were definitely not as friendly as the ghosts he had met at the wall.

Remembering that incident reminded him of those smattering of lessons with the ghost priest.

He was losing energy quickly, and the ghosts were closing in fast.

Harry ripped off a piece of loose bark, bit his finger with a sharp tooth and began to paint the exorcism sigils. When he was done, he stood up and began to chant the words that the priest had taught him and for good measure, he created a ring of fire around him, remembering other tales about the importance of being inside circles when dealing with the supernatural.

He was unsure if it would actually work, but to his surprise, the writhing wall of misty ghosts churned along the outer edges of his fire ring, shrieking in displeasure, before they retreated as quickly as the fog had rolled in.

Harry felt immediately better, but continued his chant for a full hour after just to be on the safe side.

When he was done, he extinguished the flames and, because it had been so useful, attached the bit of tree bark sigil to his walking stick after carefully placing it under a bit of lament he carried in his pack for sketches he sold people and hung it by a sturdy bit of chain from the top.

The night had cleared up and he was sure that he wasn’t going to be further bothered by any ghosts in the area.

He was about to continue his journey when he remembered something about the traditions surrounding the ghosts.

One of the things that seemed to make the spirits restless was being forgotten, or unfound. It was why the dead were always honored in Vietnamese tradition.

He didn’t know who all those dead people had been, or how they had died, and he was reasonably certain that he was not related to any of them, but he figured the least he could do, especially for the sake of other travelers, was to assuage their restlessness, even if only for a bit.

Harry looked around and spotted a good sized flattish boulder.

He Lifted it out of the ground, setting it vertically in the center of the circle of scorched earth he had recently created.

After some thought, he nodded to himself and applied perhaps the most meticulous, careful and fine application of his flaming ability.

He didn’t know how to write in the local dialect, but figured the ghosts wouldn’t overly care about those fine points, and set to work.

When he was done, he nodded to himself, pulled out a peach pit and planted it in the center of the circle and then nestled his work against the base of the trunk.

Satisfied, he bowed at the stone then set off again.

On the stone, words still cooling after being carefully etched in flame and melted deep into the stone were the words:
In honour of the dead unfound, but not forgotten, always remembered.

Ooo ooo ooo

Bếp cựa Thiên Chúa Village, Vietnam...

Harry was passing through a modest, but still relatively well-off village when the late hour and some amazing smells from a small out of the way tavern on the edge of the village caught his attention. Shrugging, he figured a little pit stop for the night wouldn’t hurt, so he went in, and after only eliciting a few curious looks from the warm crowded tavern, he was left unbothered, so he took a table and ordered the special, which turned out to be a large bowl of Bún bó Huế, a spicy, lemongrass rice vermicelli noodle soup served with fresh herbs and vegetables. He took in a deep breath of the steam and grinning, dug into the dish.

Harry enjoyed his dinner so much that he ordered a second bowl before moving onto a small serving of cold lychee. Impressed with the meal, he wove his way through the tavern, and peeked into the back where a small kitchen was manned by a large jolly sort of man in his late 50’s who moved in the space with an ease and dexterity of one who had worked there for many years. His hands and arms moved so fast, grabbing this and that spice, chopping, sprinkling, stirring. It was astounding really.

Harry, who was wearing his special earrings at the time so he could observe without being seen from his position over said man leaning back against the roof, was startled when, as the tide of orders died down, the man slowed down, leaning back against the counter, and looked directly up at Harry saying “well, the dinner rush has died down and I’m on my break, you can come down now,” Harry stared in shock, frozen. The man huffed a breath “no need to be so surprised lad, it isn’t everyday a little miter like you can sneak up on one such as myself, even a magic one with little magical baubles hanging from his ears.”

Harry wearily eyed the individual, removing the earrings, but didn’t lower himself to the ground; more adjusted his position so the man wasn’t craning his neck, by settling on top of a fridge.

The man chortled, “well you’re a nervy little wall crawler aren’t you?”

Harry shrugged and replied, “I’m used to having to be careful at times. You’re obviously more than a regular man, to both see me and react so calmly to a boy on his ceiling.”

The man hummed in agreement as he pulled out a small flask of saki, taking a few pulls. The flask itself was a thing of beauty, made to look like a hearth made of silver, with a little fire wrought in gold.

Noticing Harry’s startled gaze he replied, “got this as an offering from a Chinese soldier passing through the area a few centuries back, took a liking to it. he took a swig and asked “so, what brings you stealthily into my kitchen?”

Harry, who had noted the “few centuries back” comment, decided to take the nonchalant approach and replied, “I really enjoyed the soup, I was hoping to observe how it was made so that I can make it myself, I thought there might be some basil in there, and I thought maybe some scallop leaves…”

The otherworldly cook perked up, “caught the scallop leaves did you? Well, it’s not every day that you come across a young man of your age, and a foreigner at that, who has some interest in the delicate art of cuisine.”

The man whirled, and with quick motions, he had cleared a space on the counter, laid out a selection of cooking tools and ingredients. He didn’t bother to ask Harry to come down, instead he set to
work, though slower this time, for benefit of his audience, and explained as he went along.

“Now, I like to pre-make my stock ahead of time, a light base made with beef and pork bones, though I like to throw in a chicken bone in there from time to time as well, and I use lots of lemongrass and shrimp paste…”

He continued talking, describing each step easily, and occasionally would regale Harry with an anecdote or other surrounding this knife or that jar of fermented radish.

At some point as he talked and cooked, Harry came down from off the fridge and squeezed in next to the man and actually had a go at some of the preparation. He was complimented for his chopping style, but corrected his stirring and his mincing.

Eventually they finished, and a large pot of steaming Bún bò Huế.

“Well! that was fun!” the man, who had introduced himself as Pham Lang, said with satisfaction, “but it’s rather late, and my lovely wife Nhi-Thi, has likely closed up for the evening, so best to get you to one of our available rooms now if you were looking for a room for the evening.”

Harry nodded, feeling exhausted and relatively relaxed now in the other’s company now that nothing negative had happened, and he had improved his culinary skills to boot.

They were meant by a rather handsome woman who greeted her husband and their guest graciously, and organized perhaps the most comfortable room he had ever slept in, practically melting into the bed, and was asleep in an instant.

He didn’t see when a second man joined the first two as they surrounded his sleeping form.

Ooo ooo ooo

Later in Harry’s room…

“Took you long enough,” Pham Lang grunted to the other man, who narrowed his eyes with annoyance and was about to retort with an insult of his own when Nhi-Thi snapped at them both.

“Pham Lang! Trong Cao! So help me, if you two wake the poor boy up you can both observe to your own husbandly duties outside for a week!”

Both men, knowing that when she used their full names like that, not looking to anger their wife further, stopped arguing.

The woman smoothed out the silk of her fine ao doi that had magically replaced her simpler tavern keeper’s garb with a put upon sigh, while the men fidgeted in their less modern, but exemplary fine, ao giao lĩnh, the stylized patterns of red and gold glinting in the moonlight through the open window on all three.

As Cao was filled in on that day’s events by Lang, the goddess mused herself with fussing with the boy’s blankets, while her husbands exchanged gossip.

“…then I was made late when I ran into the mươi hai bà mụ on my way from the fields, and they just had to show me the latest smiles of the latest little brats,” Cao finished with an annoyed grumble, then turned to the present situation, his wife and fellow co-husband wearing equal expressions of sympathy and amusement, “So this is the boy that has started raising some ruckus?” his tone rather dubious.
She turned her gaze back to the boy and said with a musing tone, ignoring her husband’s tone, “When Ngoc Hoang mentioned to the entirety of the celestial house to keep an eye out for this Boy-Who-Changes, I had not thought someone so important would slip into our view, especially while we were attending to our duties in such a small village.”

“He’s pretty runty for someone that’s caught the attention of our vaunted emperor,” Cao mumbled, eyeing the small figure curled under his wife’s best and softest sheets.

“That’s ‘cause he’s still a youngin’ yet,” Lang replied, “get a few more years under his belt and some good food, and he’ll be a good strapping shining example of a man no doubt, and with cooking skills like his, the good food part won’t be a problem,” he gave an approving nod.

“Well, either way, at least we’ll have something else to mention to Ngoc Hoang during our yearly report, it will be interesting to see how the Emperor reacts to the news,” mused Cao, and the other two nodded in agreement.

Eventually both men lost interest and left the room, plans for a rousing game of Parcheesi, leaving Nhi-Thi alone with the boy. She ran her fingers through his hair and hummed a pleasant song when the boy stirred under her touch, relaxing the child back to sleep.

“So young to have already caught the attention of so many powerful beings,” she mused out loud, with an almost pitying tone, “rest in splendid comfort now child, for I suspect somewhere in your future it will be a long while before you can know such uncomplicated heaven.”

Ooo ooo ooo

When he awoke the next day, he was surprised to find himself in a completely empty building that looked like it hadn’t seen an inhabitant in years.

Harry left feeling slightly discombobulated by how he had awoken, yet not wholly surprised really, he had read of such occurrences in his books, and otherwise considered it a positive experience all around, especially when he spied a newspaper, finding that he hadn’t lost any years, and thus decided not to be bothered by it and continued on his journey.

Chapter End Notes

1. Encylopdia site, “South China Sea.”, 2. All information on Hanoi and other Vietnamese locations from Wikipedia + travel documentaries, 3. Egg Coffee is actually a common drink in Vietnam, 4. Frogs actually are a common food item in Vietnam, you can buy large bags of them in the market, an influence from one of the outside countries that occupied them for a period of time, 5. Lê Dung was a Vietnamese soprano opera singer that toured all over Eastern Europe and was a member of the Hanoi Opera amongst other things and In 1993, she became the youngest ever person to be accredited as People's Artist (or "NSND"), Vietnam's top artistic award for a living artist, 6. Bodhisatva Quan Am (“bodhisattva is the Sanskrit term for anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated bodhicitta, which is a spontaneous wish to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.” – Wikipedia), 7. “Loser” is by BangBang, a South Korean boy band and a popular pop song right now in Vietnam.
July 5, Harry, age 11, Indonesia…

Harry's arrival in Indonesia squirreled away a trawler, an archipelago comprising thousands of islands, started in the beginning of the month after the last remaining days of his visit in the Philippines where he had snuck aboard the boat after enjoying some leisure at a bathhouse in Palawan, on the coast of the Sulu Sea.

Indonesia is a country that has been heavily influenced by foreign powers over the centuries, drawn to its natural resources. Muslim traders bringing the now-dominant Islam, while European powers brought Christianity (though in minority now a days), and fought one another to monopolise trade in the Spice Islands of Maluku. Following three and a half centuries of Dutch colonialism, Indonesia secured its independence after World War II, and defined itself by a national language, ethnic diversity, and religious pluralism, a merged diversity that the country took pride, becoming Indonesia's national motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" ("Unity in Diversity") (1).

Harry had touched down in on Tarakan, located on one of Indonesia's islands of the same name in the province of North Kalimantan.

Harry wandered around the small and only city of the place talking to various locals, and was rather tickled by the fact that Tarakan was a name derived from the old Tidung language that basically meant "meeting place to eat," and so Harry decided to stay for a time to do exactly that.

As Harry explored, Tarakan was indeed as small as he thought with only a population of 193,069, but despite its smaller size, displayed Indonesia's Unity in Diversity pride with a mix of native residents are such as the Tidung, a subgroup of the Dayak people and a multi-ethnic population from other parts of Indonesia, such as Bugis, Javanese and Chinese Indonesians and relations between the groups were relatively peaceful barring a riot or two in their past, but presently rather restful.

As had been Harry's experience with other communities of multi-ethnic influences, the food was always good and the stories even more so, though his never had his food and his stories crossed quite so well as the day he went coconut hunting.

Harry had camped out in a grove on the outskirts of a coconut farm on the outskirts of Tarakan heading out in a tough South Easterly direction and had decided to grab a little breakfast off one of the outlying trees.

Harry had reached out to a rather large plump looking coconut and had plucked it from the branches only to receive a shock when the thing suddenly jiggled and began to laugh. The laughter increased and then with a pop! He was suddenly holding a decapitated head which continued to laugh at him (2).

Harry let out a shriek and dropped the thing, which zoomed off, giggling like a loon.

Harry shivered, let out a giggle of the slightly hysterical variety before zooming off in the opposite direction.

Thus Harry's welcome into Indonesia's equally variedied supernatural otherness was given.
Harry was passing through Pontianak city while on Borneo Island, the third largest island in the world when one of the many tropical rains let loose a particularly heavy deluge, and Harry was forced/decided that this might be a good place to wait out the weather. He perched himself in the V of a support strut under the Kapuas bridge, thankful that it wasn't windy as well as raining.

The roaring ping of the rain on the steel around him was actually oddly soothing and Harry found himself dozing comfortably in his dry spot. He awoke to find that the rain had lessened significantly into more of a thick mist, which with the early July heat, was actually somewhat pleasant to fly into.

Harry rose slowly up the bridge, peaking over the edge, watching for possible witnesses, only to find that the bridge relatively deserted and writhed in fog. At least it was deserted until a weeping woman dressed in some sort of white muslin dress walked out of the fog. Harry blinked, somewhat startled by her presence, not spotting any sort of car nearby. She had beautiful pale skin and long dark hair, and was quite lithe but for the large rounded middle signifying her pregnancy.

Oddly, the woman's crying sounded more like an infant's then an adult female, and seemed to grow weirdly fainter the closer she drew to Harry's position. There was an odd scent of something floral that drifted towards his nose, growing steadily stronger. He paused uncertainly. She looked rather distressed, and a pregnant woman walking around the edge of a bridge in this weather so far from the city or any sign of car or other vehicle, was concerning, so Harry didn't think anything of it by calling out to her.

"Hey, are you alright?" The woman didn't say anything, her face still covered by her hands, the odd crying nearly illegible now, the scent became stronger. "Do you need any help? Um hello?" Harry tried again. Granted, he was still learning the local tongue but even his voice should have been enough to draw something of a reaction from the distraught woman.

He reached out, intending to perhaps touch her shoulder, direct her further away from the edge of the bridge perhaps, when the floral scent suddenly became overwhelmingly cloying, almost choking, the sound of her weeping could no longer be heard, and the flowery perfume became foul and rancid.

Then the woman's hands fell away and revealed a ghastly, almost rotted face filled with a yawning sharp toothed maw. The hands lashed towards his stomach, as the phantom tried to gut him. Harry fell back, took to the air and smacked the end of his sprit stick so hard over the creature's head, that it shrieked silently in pain, sounding very distantly like a baby's pained wail, unnerving Harry more.

The creature was sucked back into the fog, which in turn retreated with the heat of the rising sun, the baby's wails growing progressively louder until they stopped, making his ears ring (3).

A dog howling in the distance broke Harry out of his reverie and he quickly took to the sky before he could be noticed.

Harry had decided to take a break on the shore of a modest sized pond in Southern Sumatra.

The pond from up above was out of the way of any sort of human presence, surrounded by a thick tree line, with a small grassy shore dotted by wild flowers. Upon landing, he saw purple and white orchids growing under the shade of trees, and Eucalyptus with its tiny fuzzy white flowers swaying...
in the breeze.

It was idyllic, but oddly without any insects or animals. Harry looked around the area, breathing in the sweetly scented air with a sigh. It was certainly perfect spot for a quick kip, maybe even a good site to set up camp and study some of his books.

Harry landed and began looking for a spot to pitch his bird house. While he was looking for the perfect bit of ground with the best view, the lovely spot had an odd lack of insects and animals; in fact it was oddly quiet.

Harry frowned, looking around him, hand hovering inside his pack ready to pull out his gear. The longer he lingered in fact, the more that the hairs on the back of his neck began to stand on end, the sights before him at odds increasingly with Harry's well-honed sense of danger by this point. Harry leapt into the air, not one to ignore his instincts.

He was suddenly forcefully jerked to a stop when something large wrapped around his ankle (4).

Harry looked down and yelped in fright when he beheld a long single thick tentacle of some kind, made entirely of water coming out of the pond and wrapped around his foot, inching its way up his leg.

Quickly he tried to set it on fire, only to yell in pain when he accidently burned himself when the water became hot instead of setting aflame, and he stopped quickly. He didn't have a ring to bubble with and he was not about to use extremity explosion for the same reason flaming hadn't worked.

He tried Lifting rocks and tree branches, lobbing them at the thing, but they just went right through it as well. He tried Happyfeet, but nothing happened.

The thing began to wheel him towards the surface of the pond, and it was clear to Harry that if he didn't do anything soon, whatever was in there was going to drown/eat him.

Without any options left, he pulled out his staff, enlarged it, and hoped that what he had used on the ghosts in Vietnam and the wailing woman on the bridge would work on whatever had him here.

While it didn't banish the creature, the tip of his staff with its anti-ghost emblems did cause the thing to let him go.

A high pitched bubbly scream of rage filled Harry's ears for a long time as he flew away as fast as he could.

Ooo ooo ooo

July 20th, Pulau Belitung Island, Java sea...

Harry had heard through the helpful stall tenders in Tarakan that Belitung was the place to find the best pepper, it being a place well known for it as well as its tin.

Harry was passing over the island anyway so he decided to spruce up his ingredients by getting some.

The population is centred in several small towns; the largest are Tanjung Pandan in the west and Manggar in the east, which are the respective capitals and Harry spent his time on the island traveling between them, visiting Tanjung panadan's Dutch colonial architecture and a colorful harbor where he painted the local sights and even sold a piece to a local dignitary passing through.
While he was on the Island he visited anjung Tinggi and Tanjung Kelayang beaches which was strewn with rounded granite boulders, fine sand and calm waters, snoozed atop a lighthouse in Pulau Lengkuas, one of many small offshore islands, and went Normal tourist for the hell of it, paying a local for gear and snorkeled among its coral reefs.

Harry was staying at a small bathhouse outside of Tanjung Pandan, relatively isolated and usually frequented by the sparse farmers and homecoming fishermen and eccentric genteel. He had just finished a relaxing mineral bath and was enjoying a cup of tea while overlooking the calm flatness of the Java Sea while writing his latest entry in his latest journal:

"… Many of the stories I have heard since entering any country which cradles the Java Sea, particularly since my arrival in Belitung, has regaled me with the various stories of Java and its many secrets and attributes.

One excitable marine biologist named Ritcher (5) jawed my ear off in Pulau about the flora and fauna species that call this shallow sea their home…a shallow sea! It's so odd to hear such a slim term for something associated with something so large, particularly after my little underwater adventure awhile back.

Besides these, then of course there are the treasure hunters that make up a good portion of the tourists here. In fact, I meant a relic hunter all the way from the States just earlier this evening, a university professor named Sydney, and apparently a black belt who globetrots after lost, stolen and rumored-of artifacts and antiquities (6).

I got this long lecture about how the Java Sea is supposed to be a bed for treasures of the past like none other. Wrecks of ships are reportedly still beneath the water here which make it a good choice for historians and relic hunters like herself to probe secrets of past she was apparently after some cursed object that is supposedly on the wreck of a ship called Indono that sank in 1955 and is still in the Java Sea, near the waters of Karimunjawa.

The women was pretty tired and told me a lot of interesting stories for a Normal, and while she doesn't look to be something like me or anything else Abnormal, she has certainly had a lot of colourfully supernatural experiences, and given my own I wouldn't be surprised if that artifact she was after was actually cursed.

I hope she doesn't get caught up by any of the piracy, there has been a lot about that in the local news recently, and then there is that weird elephant headed fish that chased me for over an hour while Bubbling over here doesn't eat her.

I really need to be more careful where I was going, I didn't mean to bump into that underwater bolder and awaken it from the crevice underneath. Oh well, that many armed woman who came out of nowhere looked capable of handling it." (7)

Harry closed his book, storing it away and snuggled down in his bed for the evening.

Ooo ooo ooo

July 26-July 31, Batu Islands…

The Batu Islands is a section of Indonesia that saw very few ferries and thus leaving the people of the area relatively isolated.

They got some but not very many visitors to the island outside of the neighbouring islands on either end of the Batu (in particular the Nias to the north), usually the occasional intrepid explorer or
Fishermen, so Harry tried to stay out of sight of the locals, since they were likely to be suspicious of a lone foreigner pre-teen was found wandering around, though when he wanted to go into the various villages and towns he would wear his special earrings.

During his time there, he found that the island was a palm tree riddled paradise, with coral lagoons. Children ran around through the streets in the villages, along the sandy shores or older children, teens and young adults alike body boarded in the surf.

The main source of food for the people of the island is fish, and Harry would often trail the fishermen who would head out singing together or to themselves, wearing grass or cloth hats with net bags and sharp ended sticks thrown over their shoulders.

Harry soon discovered that the locals used a method of fishing called fatabo, which was a method were the men would gather in groups, calling out in a group song, and would walk through the shallows in a circle then walking towards shore, herding the fish towards shore and they beat their sticks back and forth, left to right, almost like some loose sort of dance, sending small walls of water erupting on either side of each man and occasionally they would splash each other, laughing.

This actually worked well, to Harry's amazement, as brightly coloured turquoise parrot fish leapt out of the water and onto the sand.

The men then speared the fish with the sharp end of their sticks, and strinuged the pile together, tossing the catch on their back and making their way back to the village.

Harry himself tried his hand at fatabo on the day he turned 12, looking to have a fish feast for himself to celebrate, but quickly discovered that it was definitely a team effort, so he conjured duplicates of himself using the Gemini Needle.

While it was fun, the accumulated memories of being surrounded by himselfs as himself from various angles so close together was a bit disorientating, and he didn't catch any fish anyway, so gave up that method for bust.

In the evening, as he had the past 4 evenings he had been here, Harry perch on the grass roofs and listen to the men singing about those who would leave the island but even as they had to leave, would never forget where they came from (8).

It made Harry think about where he had come from, and though he would never think of it fondly, he had to admit that he would never forget where he came from either.

Ooo ooo ooo

As he was celebrating his 12th birthday, an owl of non-local origins with a letter addressed to "Harry Potter" but no listed location tied to its leg, was winging his way over the Indian Ocean, the Batu Islands were framed by the moonlight and just in sight.

The stalwart owl let out a relieved hoot. His delivery was nearly over.

Suddenly a gust of wind picked up under the owl's wings and sent the bird reeling closer towards the watery surface.

Out of nowhere a trunk shaped nose shot out of the water and dragged the bird underneath the water, leaving only a stray brown feather floating on the surface.

Ooo ooo ooo
After some hunting around, he managed to find a nice thicket outside of Blitar City where he set up his enlarged Bird house.

He went to a nearby river and set about his usual bit of chores as he fished, dug up, or picked some local fauna for his dinner. He did his laundry, hanging it to dry on a line, and dug the usual latrine hole, a common practice for times when he didn't set himself up in a city or town and was going to stick around for a few days.

When he was done with his set up, he concentrated on some of his studies, before calling it a day, pulling off his cloths from the line and making sure to shake them out in case of bugs then turned off his oil lamp and went to bed.

In the morning, he awoke to the beautiful sunlit green of a rolling valley of farm land, lazily winding roads to which he could see locals traversing to Blitar City to visit the Penataran temple complex (9), for the first festival that Harry was going to observe, the Pesona Bumi Penataran Art Performance that would last a few days (10).

Harry excitedly got cleaned and dressed and joined the throng heading to the temple.

It was a pure celebration of Blitar Art and culture, and Harry fascinatingly observed a conglomeration of both old and contemporary art and also attended a theatrical presentations of the history of the Penateran. After his first day, his feet were quite tired, and had been grateful for the chance to find an out of the way spot late at night to fly off back to camp.

Day 2…

As was a common feature sometimes when he entered cities that Harry also paid a visit to a local museums, this time being Blitar's Bung Karneo Museum and library. He paid a small donation and signed a guest book to enter the complex and spent time wandering through the various exhibits.

The museum had a lot of photos and stories, many of various political figures, particularly of the first president. While Harry was not overly interested in politics in general, the photos and art gave him a strong sense of how important this first president was to the present day republic.

There are good photo opportunities for tourists here as well with wall displays and statues to stand in front of, and many other tourists were taking advantage, Harry even being asked to hold a camera or two.

On leaving the complex, Harry found himself in a maze of souvenir vendors, and found himself actually buying an item or two before he could make his way out. He ended his day at the museum by going across the street and eating some food at one of the various small bamboo warungs to recover before moving on.

After the trip to the museum, Harry decided that he still had plenty of time left, so he bought himself a small motor bike, and took a road from Blitar, going up into the surrounding hills, down compact roads around and through some remnant forest, and skirting along some interesting rocky gorges.

The land, from what Harry knew from listening to the various tourist guides, was not too fertile so the region has been spared the over-development which has ruined many parts of the island in the area, and was thus quite beautiful.

Harry eventually found himself at Tambakrego, a popular, though surprisingly quiet beach. The beach itself is cradled in a picturesque piece of coast with a large headland, and a small lagoon with
little fish swinging lazily in the clear blue water. There were just a few wooden houses and a couple of food stalls and warungs along the beach; and Harry spent his stay swimming and sketching the fantastic views of the Indian Ocean.

He finished his day by trying his hand at some surfing with a group of older boys, a combination of locals and tourists, taking advantage of the surf and failing completely to their amusement, but was praised for his excellent cooking skills over a flame when he volunteered his services to cook the various fish and clams that were brought over by another group of boys.

They danced to local and foreign music alike, shared scary stories, and generally had fun being kids, something that Harry could appreciate.

Day 4…

On this day it was a day of learning as Harry listened unseen to Javanese intellectuals, writers, poets and men and women of letters at a local university, intellectuals that were known for their ability to formulate ideas and creating idioms for high cultural purpose, through stringing words to express a deeper philosophical meanings and Harry was reminded somewhat nostalgically of his time on the mystical mountain back in China, and how there to many of the men and women would gather together and listen to each other share their knowledge and creativity.

Day 5…

Harry observed a group of Tenggerese or Tengger people, an ethnic minority in eastern Java who claim to be the descendants of the Majapahit princes during a lunch break.

The Tenggerese, Harry learned, worship a host of spirits, a form of ancestor worship that sort of reminded him of other similar traditions he had observed in previous countries he had visited.

He watched the worship of cikal bakal, the spirits of the founders of the village, the roh bahureka, the village guardian spirits and the roh leluhur, the spirits of the ancestors.

Harry was lucky enough to be able to observe from a distance some of the rituals to propitiate these spirits being conducted by a selection of special priests. During the rites that Harry saw, he watched as little doll-like figures representing the spirits, clothed in batik cloth, were presented with food and drink. It was apparently believed that the spirits partake of the essence of these offerings.

Harry was tempted to take one for himself, but ultimately left them alone in respect to the local traditions and just in case he annoyed any actual spirits.

Day 6…

The following day, Harry finished his stay in Blitar in the central area of the city called Blitar Square.

This area of the city contained open parkland with grass lawn areas where families were throwing frisbees to each other or their dogs, having picnics, or painting. There was a wide central concrete path bustling with locals and tourists that perused a couple of open-air pavilions or rented/bought at a long line of bikes from a motorbike park at the back of the square and vendors selling toys, snacks and renting out small electric vehicles that many children rode on, the colorful balls of youthful delight zipping around to their families’ amusement.

Harry’s delight though, lay in the many street-food vendors surrounding the park. Harry had acquired a book on Indonesian Cuisine at some point, and according to its glossy pages, Indonesian food was some of the most vibrant and intense flavoured foods in the world.
Harry was unsure if that was true, but he was always eager to put it to the test, and had been testing since his arrival in Indonesia and had yet to have that claim proven wrong.

Harry feasted on Bek Bek, a local duck cuisine, that had a delicious crispy golden brown outside with a softer, tenderer inside, and commonly as a thigh and leg, ate by tearing it with the fingers, which Harry did eagerly, humming his appreciation as juices tried to escape out of the corner of his mouth.

Harry ate crepes slathered in dark chocolate, combining a rich velvety texture with a vague sweetness and a crispy crepe base, and washed it down with a rather strong hot ginger tea.

Flavours from the Randang, a sort of rendered caramelized beef dish served in a sauce, was Harry's favorite of the day. It had a strong spicy flavour, but not to overpowering, just…intense. It used to be a dish served for ceremonial purposes in the Minangkabau culture of Indonesia, but eventually began being served across the country, also achieving a certain international fame amongst other countries, particularly in America, which Harry could understand.

After getting a few recipes from some of the friendly sellers, Harry ended his trip, and moved on to the next location.

Ooo ooo ooo

August 19 th , Gili Air, Gili Islands…

The Gili Islands were three small disc-like islands that had no dogs and no motorized vehicles, with soft sanded beaches and an oddly quiet laid back air to the place. Harry, passing through, occasionally spotted tourists and locals alike in front of small huts swinging in hammocks in the delightful breeze.

Every evening, the villagers and the visitors would gather on the shore to watch the breathtakingly beautiful sunset, caressing with golden fingers over the neighbouring volcanic peaks of another island across the water.

Harry ended up spending a week here instead of just a day, painting the beautiful scene with oils, with the scent of barbequing seafood filling the air up and down the coast constantly tickling his noise. This would be Harry's call to stop for the evening and he would pack up his things, and join the crowds eating and clapping to the live bands.

Ooo ooo ooo

August 27 th , Lombok Island…

The provincial capital and largest city on the island of Lambok, a roughly circular island with a tail of land, is Mataram, lying on the western side of the island.

While here, Harry visited the Taman Mayura, a water palace built in 1744, and also the location of some of the fiercest battles that took place between Dutch and Balinese forces in 1894 during the Dutch invasion.

Harry didn't get much time to enjoy the sights though as he was caught up in an unexpected ghostly rendition of said battle as soon as he stepped foot in the place.

Tourists had been confused, thinking it a show of some sort, then was quickly terrified when the reality that this wasn't a show hit.
Harry’s had to save the day by doing a mass exorcism and had to leave quickly before potential witnesses pinned him down.

Unbeknownst to him, a group of men dressed in red battle cloaks popped into existence not too long after Harry left and began erasing memories after getting statements of a mysterious black haired youth driving the ghosts away.

By the time they started conducting a search for the mysterious youth; Harry was already leaving Indonesia.

Chapter End Notes

1. All information on Indonesia and its various cities and provinces and so forth are taken from a combination of an online Encyclopedia, Travel documentaries, and Wikipedia.,
2. Gundul Pringis- the Javanese word for "grimace-bald head". It was named according the gundul pringis appearances (a bald-bodiless head with grin face ) and took delight in scaring people. Though unlike the ones from myth, I made mine capable of coming out in early day light.,
3. Pontianak- "...a female vampiric ghost in Malaysian and Indonesian mythology who is said to be the spirits of women who died while pregnant and in som of the earliest recordings of pontianaks in Malay lore describe the ghost as originating from a stillborn child and usually announces its presence through high-pitched baby cries. If the cry is soft, it means that the pontianak is near, and if it is loud, then it must be far. Some believe that if you hear a dog howling, that means that the pontianak is far away. But if a dog is whining, that means the pontianak is nearby. Its presence can sometimes be detected by a nice floral fragrance identifiable as that of the plumeria, followed by an awful stench (resembling that of dead corpses) afterwards."- Wikipedia.,
4. This is a combination of Onggo-inggi and Uwel from Indonesia Folklore, both creatures who use water as a medium when hunting humans.,
5. Marine Biologist Ritcher is Jason James Ritcher, the main character from the film "Free Willy" all grown up.,
6. Professor Sydney Fox from the American show "Relic Hunter" whose description was taken from the IMDb website and was a show I watched as a kid.,
7. The Elephant headed fish and the many armed woman that Harry refers to is the Makara, a creature ridden by the river goddess Ganga (the many armed woman) and the sea god Varuna from Hindu Culture. The Makara is considered a guardian of thresholds as well as throne rooms.,
8. Batu Island lifestyle was derived from a documentary on the location from YouTube and a bit of info from Wikipedia.,
9. The Penataran temple complex is the largest Hindu temple complex in East Java, Indonesia, located roughly 10 km north of Blitar and is believed to have been under construction from the 12th Century to the 15th Century.,
10. Pesona Bumi Penataran Art Performance -This show is the event series of Blitar Anniversary featuring the distinctive art and cultural attractions of Blitar and traditional dance that visualize the story in Penataran temple.
August 31, Harry aged 12, Papua New Guinea…

Harry exhaustedly dragged himself out of the waters on the shores of the newest country he was to visit.

The bubbling had been a bit of a longer trip then he had anticipated, and a sudden storm and treacherous waters above his head had discouraged his attempts to surface and take a break, instead preferring to stay under, in the calmer environment under all that.

As a result, he'd spent an entire day traveling the colourful reefs, exotic fish, and shared a rather unnerving staring contest with a group of great white sharks that had been attracted to his bubble for some reason, rubbing their large slate grey and white bodies along the surface for a solid 2 hours before eventually moving on.

Harry took a moment to simply enjoy the sandy surface under his sweaty back, a surface that didn't require concentration to maintain its existence before he got up and set about finding a place to settle.

When he was done securing his bird house, still leery of more storms in the possible near future, between a group of large stones under some trees, he peeled off his cloths and washed up in a nearby river, then later building a fire where a plump fish was roasting on a stick as he lay back, enjoying the crackle of flames.

As he lounged, he pulled out his latest guide on his newest location.

According to the book, Papua New Guinea is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world; outstripping his previous stop with its 848 languages, of which 12 have no known living speakers.

With the population living in customary communities, most of it rural, this was good for Harry, more land to hide him, and definitely more areas to choose from to plant his peach trees, which he was sure would enjoy the rich soil of the farmlands.

Best of all, it was the country that was least explored, meaning that Harry could find himself a large piece of land to practice his magic if he so wished.

Excellent!

Ooo ooo ooo

September 4, Somewhere deep in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea…

Harry had met his second encounter with sentient birds while traveling through the dense humid underbrush of a rainforest canopy, trailing a group of local monkeys out of curiosity.

He stumbled upon a flock of beautiful colourful birds with red and burgundy wings and back, a yellow patch on the shoulders, a pale turquoise head, dark emerald green underbellies and an odd tail plumage that looked like the curled mustache of an old silent era movie villain.
Harry would later learn that these were known as the Birds of Paradise, a grouchy species that did not like flying boys stumbling into their nesting territories.

Like the bird he had meant in Korea, this group seemed to associate him as some sort of unusual featherless bird that had the ill luck of looking like a human.

They made no qualms about insulting him as they drove him from their territory, with Harry apologizing all the way, and lots of "baldy egg breaker" thrown his way.

Eventually when the birds had gone, satisfied that he wasn't threatening their nests, Harry made sure to keep a wary eye out for the colourful cantankerous birds, taking a circular route and managed to further avoid them.

The encounter had actually been advantageous in a way as well for both parties as the species had not been listed by Ferdis and Harry had considered eating one before they began insulting him. It looks like he would have something to relate to the parrot should he see him again.

Ooo ooo ooo

*September 6, Unnamed town, Bougainville Island…*

Harry was passing through a small town in Bougainville Island, buying a new sickle knife when he was suddenly dragged into an alley between two buildings by a group of men.

Their intentions where clear in their lascivious grins and gazes, and something that Harry had experienced before of course, and of course like others, these men would soon discover that "no" means no.

A few minutes later a small group of penguins waddled frantically out of the alley, Harry continuing on with his journey.

Locals noticed the unusual sight of penguins during Harry's time on the island, an odd occurrence happening at the same time that a marked rise in the disappearance of men and some women all over the island at the same time, which would forever go unexplained, but provide the small island with a fresh new Penguin exhibit that brought in some much needed tourist capital.

Ooo ooo ooo

*September 10, Goroka, Eastern Highlands…*

*Day 1-2…*

Goroka was a small town of 19000 people and the capital of the Eastern Highland province of the country.

Harry enjoyed this area of the country from the peaks of Mount Kiss that overlooked the small populous.

The weather surprisingly temperate, the vegetation relatively lush, and earning its handle as a place of perpetual spring.

Coffee was a common cash crop in the area; and Harry had to say that the coffee was especially good from the area, and his coffee cakes had never been so flavorful since he had helped himself discreetly to a jar or two from the crops.
Smaller industries include trout farms where Harry observed the process with curiosity, but decided that he preferred the fight from a free range fish; pig farming which elicited a lot of honey suckle fire roast pork for Harry over an open spit, helped along by the delicious local honey from the bee keeping in the area.

Gardens burst forth with their bounty of broccoli, kau kau, carrots, ginger and peanuts, with nearby Bena Bena known for its pineapples. Harry's stores had never been so full, and he would have likely gained a few more stones then was healthy if it wasn't for the fact that he was constantly burning calories wandering through the mountains and running around with the other children in the fields.

Harry often joined in on games such as "Tin" which consisted of two teams of five using a bunch of empty fish and meat tins (cans) collected from the rubbish heaps of village house, enough to make a stack five rows high with rows of five, four, three, two, one cans and a ball. There was loads of noise, running around, maniacal activity, and loud disputation about the actual rules and their application.

Harry wasn't too sure about the actual rules or how to play exactly, but it was loads of fun anyway.

Day 3…

During his stay, he also became aware of a tribe called the Asaro Mudmen that lived outside of the capital; a passage in his book on the country had a passage on the group:

"… Legend has it that they were defeated by an enemy tribe and forced to flee into the Asaro River. They waited until dusk before attempting to escape. The enemy saw them rise from the muddy banks covered in mud and thought they were spirits. Most tribes in Papua New Guinea are very afraid of spirits, so the enemy fled in fear, and the Asaro escaped.

They then went into the village to see what had happened, not knowing the enemy tribesmen were still there. The enemy were so terrified they ran back to their village and held a special ceremony to ward off the spirits.

The mudmen could not cover their faces because legends say that the people of Papua New Guinea thought that the mud from the Asaro river was poisonous. So instead of covering their faces with this alleged poison, they made masks from pebbles that they heated and water from the waterfall.

The masks have unusual designs, such as long or very short ears either going down to the chin or sticking up at the top, long joined eyebrows attached to the top of the ears, horns and sideways mouths…" (1).

Harry spent time following the tribe from time to time out of sight, and eventually worked up the nerve to approach the group, and trade fish and other game, and spent a rather interesting evening listening to their local legends and stories, writing what he heard in his notebooks. Sketching a few of the warriors and even acquiring himself one of their masks.

The Next Few Weeks…

Harry spent his time on the other side of Mount Kiss in a small valley devoid of humans.

Here he practiced his magic.

Harry's experience with the pond creature in Indonesia and his inability to burn it had made him wonder if perhaps he could do the opposite of Flaming, and instead cause things to freeze.

Much to his surprise, unlike with his struggles with some of his other abilities, Freezing came much
more quickly.

A little to quickly actually, and therein lay his problem.

He had started off trying to freeze a small cup of water, only having to take to the air fast when a 50 foot radius of ice took the once lush green patch of grassland.

He had landed, poking a cautious foot at the ice beforehand, finding that everything was slick sharp jagged ice, which gleamed harshly in the sun.

"Well," Harry had muttered to himself, "ok then."

For weeks he had tried to shorten the range of the Freezing, but no matter what, it always took out large portions of his surroundings.

Animals eventually cleared out from the area of the small valley where he practiced, and the plant life was not doing much better, not built for sudden icy climates.

Harry eventually figured out the key to the power was by channeling it through a part of his body. If he used the tip of a finger to touch a bottle of water he held in his other hand, he would freeze the bottle only. If he did the same while the bottle was sitting on a rock, he froze the bottle, the rock it was sitting on and the ground in a 5 foot radius.

He had eventually determined that Freezing would only work if the object he wanted to freeze was not touching anything else and was applied by using the tip of a body part (finger, toe, tongue, nose, etc.).

After 2 weeks of this, he felt that he had done enough and had moved on, though before he did he made sure to leave an entire grove of peach trees to hopefully make up for the damage.

Ooo ooo ooo

September 30, Madang Province…

While in capital of Madang, a town of the same name Harry got to observe high peaks where he spent time practicing his aerial maneuvers, visited active volcanoes where he amused himself by seeing how far he could lift a bag of popcorn down towards the mouth of them before it popped, and of course indulged in some chit chat on his favorite subject as well as trading in a spot that held one of the country's biggest mix of languages.

From an extremely tall and lithe coastal member of Karkar island (an oval-shaped volcanic island located in the Bismarck Sea, about 30 kilometers off the north coast of mainland Papua New Guinea in Madang Province) he learned the art of making the best mustard seed curried fish he had ever tasted.

From a short nuggety highlands women from Simbai he learned the art of Mumu, an earth oven, wherein the food is placed underground with hot rocks to cook. Harry had never tasted such good roasted sweet potato before.

Harry was also introduced to the many various salad recipes, as the country was rather heavily based on fruits, vegetables, rice and legumes because of its climate and rich soil.

Harry also learned from the people that dwell along the rivers how to prepare roasted barramundi Cod wrapped in banana leaves, which became a new favorite of Harry's for the area.
Paupan cuisine often needs an assortment of diverse cooking tools, and Harry was able to expand his own cooking implements as well while in the area before eventually moving on.

Ooo ooo ooo

October 3, Miline Bay…

Harry spent the rest of his time in Miline Bay, hopping through a few of the 600 or so islands in the province, mostly fishing or practicing his magic.

Economically the province is dependent upon tourism, among the other industries of oil palm, and gold mining on Misima Island; in addition to these larger industries there are many small-scale village projects in cocoa and copra cultivation, so Harry had plenty to do and see in this area.

From Island group to Island group and even between close lying islands, the local culture changed remarkably a lot. What may be socially acceptable on one island may not be on another, so Harry was careful to try not to offend someone, or if he did, escape quickly.

The coral reefs in the area are some of the most bio-diverse in the world and Harry took advantage of this information to spend a lot of time Bubbling under the water, fascinated by all the color, life, and movement, sketching and painting beautiful pictures of marine life, many of which he sold or traded with a tidy profit to show, though he had to move on from this quicker than he had wanted to due to a minor hiccup when he scared some poor German marine Biologist in a small submarine.

Said biologist would later regale his fellows and locals at alike with his tales of the boy in the bubble under the waves, the stories getting more ridiculous and elaborate as he went on, until the unusual tale would become an urban legend of some popularity, especially among the children in the years to come.

On Harry's final days on the island, he observed a waga, a type of old paddle boat that was preserved in a small local school in a village on one of the islands, and for a lark, built his own crude waga by using a tree he toppled with his magic, shrinking it, carving it into a roughly similar shape, enlarging it, and using a set of oars he had made in a similar fashion. He used his lifting ability to move his work into the water and after settling in, used his magic on the oars and rowed out into the Pacific Ocean and on his way to his next destination.

Chapter End Notes

1. The passage that this number was attached to (which I believe came from Wiki, not my own words), all information on Papua New Guinea, its culture, games, food and so forth was taken from Wikipedia, travel logs and blogs, and documentaries.
The Boy, Going Down the Road, Part 1.

Chapter Notes

AN: Welp, its been awhile, that's for sure. Sorry about the delay folks! In regards to the next batch of chaps, Harry’s current location invited a lot of ideas, and even after parsing down what I wrote it was still long, so I have divided it up into about 2 or 3 parts.

Story Lexicon so far:

Normals: non-magical people and things notioned/made by them.
Rush/Rushing: using magic.
Lifting: levitating/telekinesis of objects
Abnormals: beings or things that is magical.
Sizing/sized: shrinking and enlarging.
Flame, Flaming- creating fire.
One Way Omnilingualism: given to him by Mari, he can understand any spoken word, but still has to learn the language to speak back and be understood.
Happy Feet Curse- Given to Harry, it is an artificially created magical inheritance that bestows the ability to turn almost all enemies into penguins and in most cases permanently.
Bubble making/Body Bubble: conjuring magical bubbles in general and creating bubble-like structures that protect Harry while he travels.
Extremity Explosion: comes out in a moment of high stress, more accidental magic really, rarely used. It was inspired from Iron Man.
A Tail: Because of an encounter with some Titans he used the Nomkey Brand, giving him a black furred prehensile tail (inspired by Goku's tail from Dragon Ball).
Bear: Harry went through a ritual that gives him the ability to turn into a golden bear.
Freezing: Ability to channel magic through an extremity to freeze something. Without careful application though he can freeze an area around him in a 50 ft radius.
Magical Devices: listed on my profile page.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

October 4, Tiwi Islands, Northern Australia.- Harry age 12...

After a very long time rowing, much of it Harry would admit he did with magic after about the first hour out and his arms, shoulders, and back began to burn and ache, until he arrived at the most Northerly point of the Tiwi islands.

The Tiwi Islands are part of the most Northerly territories of Australia, Harry’s next destination, and about 80 km to the north of the Australian mainland in the Arafura Sea. The island was mostly populated by the indigenous Tiwi peoples, and was only populated by a few thousand. Harry spent a lengthy time sketching various examples of art, the major economic export of the area. He sometimes would pause in his work to listen to the various artists tell youngsters the history behind the meaning of various totems.

The close relationship that the Tiwi had to birds fascinated Harry, and he found that the longer he
stayed, the more his own art work started to reflect that as well. Birds could be real, mythical, or spiritual. Harry’s favorite was hearing a story about an ancestor whose spirit had become a bird (granted there were a lot of those, but it was still entertaining nonetheless).

Harry rather liked that. Given how much he enjoyed flying himself, he wondered if maybe when he died he could turn into a bird to.

With the various stories of mythical birds, Harry also wasn’t surprised that he eventually bumped into one. The bird he came across was a large old depressed specimen that looked vaguely like a cross between a vulture and a reptile of some sort. He had found it perched on a branch right above his campsite one morning (1).

The bird wasn’t one of the speaking variety, but it more then made up for it when, upon catching sight of Harry’s attention, gave out the most mournful and disturbing caterwaul he had ever heard. The bird only stopped when Harry, trying to find a way to make it stop the disturbing noise, through a pear at it, which the bird snapped up from the air in its sharp hooked beak, and flew off to enjoy its spoils.

An hour later, Harry was drenched in a rainstorm.

Harry eventually left the island on the next clear day, and hoped he didn’t run across that strange depressed bird ever again.

Ooo ooo ooo

October 9, Humpty Do, Australia...

Harry frowned at the large map hovering before him as he took a long draw on a mango and honey smoothie he had experimented in making.

Harry was currently high up in the clouds, enjoying the cooler temperatures and damp mist from the odd passing clouds as he considered his next destination when flailing arms suddenly filled his vision.

Harry stared, gobsmacked, as a young man with red hair and a lot of freckles floated past him, flailing his arms in a very panicked manner, but was cackling his head off.

The man stopped flailing and giggling when he spotted Harry, his eyes widening in surprise, before he began flailing again when he dissipated into a cloud bank yelping for help.

Harry quickly folded his map away, slip his drink into the cup holder on his belt and swooped upwards, a thousand questions exploding in his head.

He found the man being attacked by a group of rather grumpy birds who didn’t take kindly to having a human suddenly end up in there midst. Harry pulled the man out of the pecking hoard, gave a brief blast of Extreme Explosion, sending them rocketing for about a mile or so, and rather glad that he had forgone his shoes that morning.

When they stopped, Harry examined this unexpected curiosity. The red head looked a bit shocked and dazed from the rocketing journey and height both, but was giggling still.

‘It figures. I come across the first flying person like me, after all this time, and he’s a nutter.’ Harry mentally sighed.

“How did you do that?” the red head gasped/giggled, “I’ve never seen a spell do that before...Did
you get stung by a Billywig to?”

Harry didn’t know what a billywig was (2), but he recognized the term ‘spell’ and sure enough, a
cursory glance revealed the presence of a wand strapped to the man’s arm. Harry scratched the back
of his neck, and asked to be sure, “Your a wizard then?”

The red head giggled but nodded. He looked confused by the question though.

“Of course I am, same as you...say is your broom invisible? Or are you using a local spell I’ve never
heard of?”

Harry huffed a chuckle, “No, I’m not a Wizard, though I reckon whatever I am might be related, in
so much as human looking Abnormals can be related to each other I suppose, like Chimps are related
to Gorillas, at least that’s what I figure.”

He scratched his nose as the giggling adult looked fascinated by that explanation, “So you have a
creature status? Are you a vampire then? No wait, its still sunny out...”

Harry made a mental note about the Vampire comment for the future, and just shrugged, unable to
answer. Instead he asked: “Are you in trouble?” and because he wasn’t exactly the most tactful
individual sometimes, “because you seem a bit touched in the head, and can you fly like me?”

The red head flailed around a bit as he swung upside down, and gratefully gripped the smaller male’s
hands when they were offered.

“No, this isn’t something I normally do unless there’s a broom or a dragon involved. I was helping
out at a reserve when I accidentally sat in a nest of Billywigs while taking my lunch break, been
floating and high as a kite in more ways then one for days. I’m never eating Fizzy Whizzbee’s again
after all this,” a mournful chortle.

“Billywigs? What are those?” Harry asked curiously.

“They’re these shiny blue magical bug with wings on their tops that spin around as they fly. Their fast
little blighters. Even the most skilled seeker would have a tough time spotting more then one or two
in their lives, and that’s if they live in the area. Their sting makes its victims float and be giddy. I
unfortunately got an arse full of the blighters. I think this is my second day in the air. My boss is not
going to be happy.”

Harry felt a wave of disappointment. He had not thought that he felt lacking in any way, having not
come across others like himself, but when he suddenly comes across the possibility of it, only to have
it dashed...he realized that perhaps him not really knowing that much about himself and others that
maybe like him out there somewhere, had affected him more then he had thought.

He sighed, swallowing heavily, and pulled out a rope. He tied one end to the red head’s waist and
introduced himself.

“My name’s Harry,” he shook the man’s hand and set about tying the other end around his wrist.

“Oh! Sorry! I’m Charlie, Charlie Weasley, Dragon Tamer.”

Harry began descending, dragging Charlie with him like an awkward man balloon.

“Do you know anyone who you can call to come get you?” Harry asked, “I have some change you
can use the pay phone.”
“Oh, those muggle talking machines, no I don’t really know any Muggleborns and Muggle-raised with those tellyphones.”

Harry raised his brow at the rather mangled use of the word telephone. Maybe the fellow was still being affected by those magical bugs?

They arrived at Harry’s camp, and Harry tied Charlie’s line to a sturdy tree trunk as he began searching through his satchel.

Harry let out a satisfactory grunt when he pulled out his last magical peach. He made a mental note to plant another seed about a mile down the road and get more.

He handed the peach up to the red head and commanded him to eat it.

The wizard wrinkled his nose, “But I don’t like peaches,” he giggled as if his fruit preferences were the most amusing joke in the world. Harry rolled his eyes, took out a large shiny knife from his belt, a blade which made Charlie’s eyes widen in alarm, and cut into the plump surface, the juices running down his fingers. He took the reasonable bite sized chunk, and without preamble, took advantage of the man’s gaped mouth to unceremoniously shove the junk into this mouth.

The red head flailed as Harry blocked his nose and mouth, forcing him to swallow. As soon as he did, Harry let him go, and sure enough, the healing factors of the peach kicked in, and he was no longer giggling, though he was still floating.

“What was that for?!” The man shouted, then paused, seeming to realize that he no longer felt giddy, in fact he was right pissed at being force fed. The pissed feeling gave way to astonishment though.

“What...?”

The rest of the fruit was unceremoniously shoved into his hand.

“Eat the rest of it, all of it. It has healing properties. It should help with rest of your side effects.”

Charlie, not looking a gift horse in the mouth, did as the boy commanded and ate the fruit, finding that the more he ate, the more he actually enjoyed himself. When he got to the pit, he frowned. The kid had said that he needed to eat all of it, did he mean the pit to?

He looked up to ask, only to see that the boy was busy with packing up his camp. Shrugging, he swallowed it in one go, used to such methods from the time or two he had to swallow down a bezoar.

Charlie unceremoniously dropped onto his arse, wincing at the brief pain, then relaxing as, still under the effects of the fruit, that injury healed quickly.

He felt himself melt back into the tree he was currently tied to.

“What is this stuff?” Charlie groaned, “I feel spectacular!”

“Magical Peaches,” the boy shrugged, “You can find them between here and China...So...you better now?”

Charlie nodded blissfully, “oh yeah.”

“Oh good then, well...I’m heading off now. There’s an Inn about two miles north of here. I don’t know how you lot get around but I figure since you got your feet now permanently planted on the
Charlie didn’t even have a chance to thank the boy before he was staring at empty space as the boy zoomed back up into the sky.

Ooo ooo ooo

Charlie eventually made his way back to the reserve after a few trips with Apparition. He told the story of his encounter with the Billywigs to his boss, received the expected lecture for not watching where he was sitting, and seemed unsurprised by Charlie’s encounter with someone with a creature status. Australia was rife with many hidden and mysterious communities of magical sentient beings that not even Wizards knew the extent of. The man merely pointed out that he was lucky he had been rescued instead of killed.

Fortunately, he was no longer needed to help cover for the sick crew that had all come down with the Wizard flu a week ago, and was sent back via port key.

Charlie had not been expected back in Romania for another week, so he decided to use the time to visit his family. His mother was ecstatic when he came out of the floo and talked about making him up a special meal just for the occasion.

Ron and Ginny were excited to have their big brother home. Of course, he was regaled with stories about the latest moronic Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, with the addition of a giant Basilisk that had been terrorizing the school, only found out when his baby sister had been possessed and kidnapped by a possessed Diary that had once belonged to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named of all people.

Charlie had nearly had a heart attack at the news, and had hugged his little sister in a rib crushing squeeze. The following meatloaf dinner was an exchange of the details of Ginny’s daring rescue by Headmaster Dumbledore with assistance of Moaning Murtle of all ghosts, helped along by a clue that a Muggleborn classmate of Ron's, one of the petrified victims of the giant snake, that the Headmaster had found in the girl's hand.

After that bit of shocking news, Charlie went into detail about his Billywig accident, and brought up the boy who had helped him.

“Goodness! I hope that poor boy had folks near by! You say it looked like he was camping all on his own?” Molly Weasley gasped in dismay when he was done recounting his tale.

Charlie nodded, “I don’t know if he has folks, but he seemed pretty self-sufficient.”

“So those bloody trees have made it all the way to Australia?” Arthur Weasley sighed, running a hand through his thinning hair, “They are making a lot of trouble for the various Wizarding Nations abroad. Its a miracle we haven't seen any in Brittan, thank Merlin.”

“Popping up like juicy dandelions!” Fred enthused.

“- Causing no small amount of chaos!” George agreed with a severe nod.

Both red headed twins smirked devilishly.

Charlie set down his fork, “Excuse me, I need to go to the bathroom.”

“Certainly dear, just use the outhouse though,” Molly said, beginning to clean the dishes, “the bathroom upstairs has been clogged again! Those pesky lawn gnomes!”
Ron flushed since it was his job this week degnoming the garden.

After tending to his business, Charlie was just closing the door to the outhouse when a rumble in the wooden walls caused him to jump, then he took a step backwards when the shaking grew more severe, then the roof exploding off caused him to yell and leap away, ducking for cover.

His yell caught his family’s attention and the red heads all crowded outside.

Every one stared.

“Oh my!” Molly gasped, a hand going to her mouth.

“Wicked!” Ginny enthused.

“Bloody hell Charlie what did you eat?!” gaped Ron.

“Yesss!” the twins cackled rubbing there hands together gleefully.

“I’ll notify the Ministry,” Arthur groaned resignedly.

Charlie just stared dumbfounded from his still prone position, now being shaded from the sun by the glorious looking large peach tree, plump fruit golden in the sunlight.

Ooo ooo ooo

October 17, Saperella Village, Austrailia...

Harry glowered at the smug face.

“You think that eating a bloke’s breakfast is funny do you?”

The animal let out a bleat, swaggering as its hump swayed side to side, licking the pot that had once held his oatmeal.

Harry spied a nearby group of straggly trees, the interconnected branches forming a natural, though jagged ring.

Harry cracked his knuckles purposefully.

1 hour later...

Benny groaned as he blinked his caked eyes open, smacking his fuzzy tongue with a grimace, and staggered out of the back end of his trunk out behind the Crooked Crocodile bar.

It was a bit late in the morning, though morning was relative when your a career alcoholic.

He let out a content sigh as he lined up his shot against a cracked fence post. He was idling wondering of that sweet young thing...Evangeline? Would be waiting tables later that night. Wednsdays were her shift...or was it Thursdays? He scratched his grizzled balding head. Hell, he had no idea what day it was now.

Then he heard a bleating noise and idly looked off into the distance. A camel rolled past in a giant clear hamster ball (3).

Benny rubbed his eyes, idly wondering if maybe he should take the night off and take his brother up on dinner and an AA meeting. He promptly zipped himself back up and headed for his car.
Harry was sitting at a picnic table at one of the many beaches of his current location. Before him was an innocent looking jar that said Vegemite (4) along the side, a plate, a piece of toast and a spoon. He had heard tourists talking about this. It is reputed to be one of the most popular polarizing condiments for foreigners to come out of Australia. People entertained themselves taste testing it.

He was willing to try most things, he could admit, but something that popular for just how bad it could potentially taste (at least from the perspective of foreigners) did make him nervous. Still, food lover that he was, he felt like he couldn’t leave the country without at least giving this Vegemite a go.

The cashier that had rang up his purchase had rolled her eyes when he had asked about it, “Just don’t do a rookie mistake and eat it with a spoon out of the jar or something. You put it on toast, that’s how its supposed to be eaten. I swear I don’t get why its such a big deal for you tourists.”

Harry had taken the sarcastic teenager’s advice and had made himself some toast earlier. Now, he was sitting in the sunshine at the shore of a beautiful beach, the smell of salt water in the air about to meet his yeasty destiny.

Harry wisely decided not to smell it before hand. He’d had enough experience with bad smelling foods in his travels to know that that they could actually taste pretty decent in contrast, such as blue cheese and Jackfruit for example.

He put on a reasonable dollop, curious to note that the consistency and the color reminded him almost of chocolate spread.

He spread on what he thought was the minimum average amount, then picked up the unassuming fair.

His first bite...

He wrinkled his nose. It was surprisingly salty, and though the bread helped, it wasn’t exactly his favorite topping. It wasn’t to his taste, but he supposed it wasn’t as bad as all the hype made it out to be. He had tasted odder in his time, thinking with feeling that 100 year old fermented egg he had tried once, shivering.

After Harry had packed up his picnic sometime later, he used the cover of a nearby ally, he took to the air for his next destination, still idly juggling the Vegemite as he flew high up out of sight, following the coast line. His mind was considering recipes that Vegemite could be used for.

Meanwhile...

Dolorus Umbridge wrinkled her nose as she surveyed her surroundings.

She had worked hard to become Senior Undersecretary to Minister Fudge, and only her dedication to maintaining her position had encouraged her to come all the way to this foreign country and stay at, the admittedly luxurious, muggle hotel where she was assisting the Minister during the yearly Minister of Magic retreat.

Still, she could have done without the annoying muggle trash littering the otherwise acceptable sandy coastline.
Smirking, the witch pulled out her stubby wand and cast a discreet muggle-repelling charm, smirking when the vermin suddenly realized they had other places to be.

Dolores settled her beach things in a good spot and, eyeing the rather enticing jeweled waters, removed the surang from around her frilly pink bathing suit, the giant kitten print glaring at the empty shore, and practically skipped to the water. She considered her self rather stately most of the time, as was befit of someone in her position, but she did enjoy a good dip from time to time, and with no witnesses around, she could indulge.

 Conjuring a bright pink cat shaped floatie, she settled back with a content sigh as she idly paddled in the lovely water.

She was a bit further out then she expected and almost falling asleep when suddenly her pleasant repast was interrupted when a jar of Vegemite suddenly fell from the sky and landed smack in her face. The stunned woman, knocked senseless by the impact, fell off her floatie, and her foot caught the craggy surface of a coral reef as she tried to dazedly right herself.

Unfortunately for the esteemed Undersecretary, her foot caught upon something else craggy, as a rather aggrieved stone fish (5).

Dolores screamed in pain, and began flailing.

Meanwhile a nearby bull-shark, rather peckish and attracted by the scent of the barest hint of blood and Vegemite commingling in the waters, spotted a flailing creature that the shark interpreted as a large pink seal ripe for the plucking and happily helped itself...

Meanwhile up above...

"Whoops!" Harry grumbled when the jar he had been juggling slipped through his fingers, disappearing through the clouds below him. He shrugged at the loss, he hadn’t really been invested anyway, and he had been flying over water, and the beach had looked abandoned when he had flew overhead, so there was no need to fetch it. Well, at least the fish could enjoy it now.

Chapter End Notes

1. Minka Bird: believed to have originated from Aboriginal tribe of Peramangk in the more Southerly area of Australia, it is said that gazing upon the bird foretells certain death (like the Grim). I like to think that the bird traveled all over the area. 2. Billywig: creature form Potterverse. 3. Camels are quite common in Australia. 4. Vegemite is a popular condiment in Australia, usually meant to be eaten on things like toast and not to be eaten directly from a spoon. 5. Stone Fish reaches an average length of 30 to 40 centimeters and up to 2 kg / 5 lbs in weight, is the most venomous fish in the world having venomous sacs on each one of its 13 spines.
The Boy, Going Down the Road Part 2.

Chapter Notes

The second part in the series. Thanks to all those who have followed and reviewed me so far.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

October 31, Australia, The Brindabellas, Harry aged 12...

Harry decided that it wouldn't hurt to do a bit of hiking though the Brindabellas, clambering though low-relief high plains with its steep margins and slopes and fault aligned river valleys with deep gorges would present a fun challenge for a hike, as well as having natural outdoor showers and washing his cloths in the numerous waterfalls he found along the way as he headed in a general southerly direction towards the eastern watershed of the Murrumbidgee River.

He occasionally stumbled across the odd mountain men and women as well as other climbing enthusiasts and even one film crew that was using the scenery for a movie. Harry paused here the longest, watching, and even had the interesting opportunity to play as extra in the film playing some hapless bystander who was gutted with ten others by a spear. It was fun, and Harry made a mental note to see the movie when it was eventually released. He eventually continued on, confusing the scene director the next morning by the mysterious fruit tree in his shot that no one could explain.

Harry noticed that as he traveled higher or lower in the range that Vegetation changed with the altitude, low elevations carried red stringy bark, white gum, broad-leaved peppermint, candlebark and brittle gum while the moister sites had alpine ash, mountain gum, narrow-leaved peppermint, manna gum and brown barrel, with tree ferns, blackwood and sassafras in gullies. It was a rich dearth of wild fauna that hoisted quite a few cooking ingredients. Sometimes he would spend an entire day just rooting around, harvesting some of the plants to use in his cooking and its various medical applications (Harry had not been sick for some time, but he believed in being prepared for anything).

Harry was on Gingera Peak when it became to dark to risk traveling anymore. He looked around and finally spotted a small deep set cave.

Harry crawled in on his hands and knees until he came into a slightly wider area that gave him enough room, just barely, to stand straight in. He pulled out a sleeping bag, a lantern, a bottle of water, and a fish sandwich, settling in for the evening.

After he partook in his small meal, Harry put away the refuse to dispose of or reuse later, curled up under the cushy covers, crumbling to himself about uncomfortable pointy rocks, and fell asleep, exhausted by his latest day of extensive trekking.

Harry awoke in alarm a few hours later when the sound of rumbling was heard coming from the mouth of the cave.

At some point earlier, a man flying a private helicopter was driven to close by high winds and into the face of the mountain above the entrance to Harry's little stop over. The impact and subsequent fireball unleashed an avalanche of rock, some of which caught on the small lip of the cave and soundly blocked Harry's escape route.
When the rumbling and loud noises had ceased, Harry tentatively examined the thick clog of stone, coming to the conclusion that he wasn't getting out that way. He considered Lifting, but he was unsure if moving the rock around like that would cause another cave in.

Harry took some deep breaths to calm himself. Panicking would only make things worse.

Harry very carefully eyed the small space he was in.

While it was a tight fit and the main entrance was completely covered in rock, he found, with a bit of feeling around and exploration, that there was a small gap in the stone at his back.

Having little option, Harry flicked his tail uncertainly, but decided that it was his best, and only option at the moment, so he resolutely firmed his nerve, and squeezed through the gap.

He promptly fell a few feet into a dark pit before he caught himself with his magic and turned it more into a careful decent, pulling out his flashlight as well.

He continued this path downward, since there was nothing upwards but more stone, and after a long time in the dark, he was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to see the sun again, when something caught the light.

Harry blinked, as a wall of dazzling rainbows refracted in the light of his flashlight. It was startlingly beautiful, the swirls and patterns entrancing him, and he felt himself pausing and flying closer.

He reached out a hand and tentatively touched the smooth rainbow swirls, startled at how surprisingly smooth, and oddly warm. It made his fingers tingle.

Suddenly two glowing orbs as big as Harry was tall opened.

Fathomless star fields and galaxies swirled in those orbs that stared directly at and through him. Harry was helpless before the ancient gaze, unable to work up even the desire to break away, enraptured by that infinite gaze.

:Traveler: the eye's hissed.

Then without sound, without struggle or alarm, a dark maw opened in the rainbows and galaxies, and Harry was sucked inside (1).

Ooo ooo ooo

Harry came to, starring up into the most beautiful faces he had ever seen. Cold and harsh, in the vague shape of women made of ice and starlight.

5 of the seven figures glowed so blindingly bright, that it was hard for him to look directly into their faces, instead he focused on the two slightly dimmer faces, to save his vision (2).

"Umm...Hello?" Harry rasped, mightily confused, and not a little bit terrified and confused as to what the bloody hell had happened.

The seven women, shared a look.

"My, he is a young one," the slightly taller of the brightest 5 intoned, as he was helped to sit up by another and was guided shakily to a nearby fire, a welcome to his frost covered skin, he was freezing!

"It has been quite some time since the serpent has gifted us with a mortal though," another smaller
women hummed, twirling a lock of long flowing pale hair.

"Not since the dingo hunter," another agreed, as she began examining Harry in fascination, seeming to be rather enchanted by his eyes, while another of the women fussied with his messy hair.

"This one is wild though," one of the dim ones approved, "young and wild! He will be ever so fascinating to tame sisters!"

The other six nodded, also exclaiming there approval.

Harry didn't like the sound of that, and everywhere they touched him, he became colder, and he didn't like the way that his skin was beginning to turn blue in spots.

Harry pulled himself away and backed up until his back hit a large boulder. He immediately tried to fly, but found that yet again his magic was blocked to him. He tried setting the advancing women on fire, freezing them, even utilizing his secret penguin power, but all yielded nothing.

In fact, his shout of seven rapid No's annoyed the beautiful ice like maidens. Nearby pine trees shivered and stretched out long talon-like branches, closing in all around him.

Suddenly, before the seven sisters or the trees could take him into their clutches, two parakeets appeared from the woods and perched on the boulder on either end behind his head and began to twitter (4).

"Hello-a-day! Hello-a-day!" The two birds sang happily, "We bring news! Great gossip!"

The seven maidens paused, the tallest, and what Harry in his mind assumed was the leader sniffed, "what would little feather chasers such as yourself have to share? Can't you see that we are busy?"

"Why its quite scandalous!" one of the parakeets, a blue one, conjoiled.

"It really will only take a few minutes to share, o great daughters of the mountain," the other parakeet, a green one, added.

The sisters frowned, but whether through boredom or actual curiosity, one of the sisters waved a had and grandly told them to go ahead.

The parakeets hopped onto Harry's head, Harry freezing, not wanting to jar them and scare them off in case he made the women mad.

The blue parakeet leaned forward and said in an enticing whisper, "Well you didn't hear it from me, but apparently the cranes have become inebriated and have begun quite a heated debate."

"Quite heated!" added the green parakeet with a solemn nod.

"Many of the great Crane Headsmen believe that their families produce the best and most beautiful of chicks," blue parakeet continued, "there was outcry and much feather ruffling, and they eventually pulled poor old owl into the whole business."

"Ever since the incident with who was the best bird, owl so tries to avoid these squabbles," Green parakeet said in aside, shaking his head in sympathy, "never manages to though." (5)

"Quite," his bother agreed.

"Why should we be interested in such mundane bird squabbles?" the eldest sister sniffed, starting to get bored.
"Oh! But my dear starlight maiden!" both birds gasped, "it only will get better!"

The sister grumbled but, seeing that her sisters were intrigued, waved a hand for them to continue.

"You see great ladies," The blue parakeet continued, "all their chicks looked the same. Scrawny, fluffy, and awkward on their bandy stilts. Even the finest of those agreed upon by each tribe, brought to bare before the discerning wisdom of the owl, and the old fellow, rightly so mind, told them he had never seen such a bunch of awkward looking plucked wrens in his life."

One or two of the sisters giggled at that.

"Oh yes, it is quite amusing," the Green parakeet agreed with a nod.

"The headsmen were less then pleased by this judgment, and gathered together to consult this revelation that their chicks were indeed rather awkward looking. This did not please their wives either, and took particular exception to the insult on their young, particularly by their own husbands," the blue parakeet shook his head.

Then the green parakeet took up the narrative, "the wives were much more sensible, as is the way with their breed, and pointed out that they were cranes and that all chicks were born the same and had been for all moons and suns that rose and set at the shore of the Great River in which the various crane tribes claimed there territory."

"This got the husbands to thinking, and eventually they went back to the Owl, who was quite annoyed, and asked the wise fellow: "what is the most beautiful creature to ever walk the great Dream?" (5)."

"The owl of course hemmed and hawed about eye of the beholder and such, but that didn't satisfy the cranes, so the owl testily regaled them of the great beauty of the seven sisters, daughters of the mountain, birthed from the sacred river of icy water and starlight. Desired by all, but wives to none."

A hearing this, the sisters, perked up a bit, but the eldest still was unmoved, drawling, "We have heard this before. That we are the most beautiful creatures dreamed of is not a surprise."

"Oh but then you'll want to hear this last bit," The green parakeet whistled, eyes bright with excitement.

"The cranes were so impressed with the story of the great sisters seven, that they asked how it was that they to could hatch such fine chicks as those?"

"Well, the owl was very much annoyed by this point, that in a fit of pique he told the snapped at them: "the only way that you will have chicks as fine as the stars in the sky is to mate with the river from which they arose, and if it is impressed by your wooing and lovemaking, then perhaps you shall all be granted with chicks as fine!"

"Of course, this was said in sarcasm, but cranes were never particularly attuned to such nuances, particularly drunk, so all the male cranes able-bodied enough left their wives and chicks to woo your birthing place to win them the finest chicks of all."

"WHAT!" the seven sisters screeched, recoiling in horror, "They dare to defile our sacred birthplace with their unworthy attentions!?" quite forgetting about the boy in their midst.

All seven women stood straight and as one turned to the thick trunk of a nearby tree, and stepped upon the inviting branches, leaping upwards like gazelles, the tree rising with them high into the sky, so high Harry couldn't see the tops, and was surprised when seven stars joined the others in the sky,
5 bright ones and two dimmer ones in the constellation he recognized vaguely as the Pleiades constellation he recognized from one of his books.

Harry was left alone in the campsite, the fire still cheerfully crackling, feeling returning to his extremities and the two parakeets perched on his head, laughing uproariously.

Ooo ooo ooo

The brothers joined Harry in front of the fire, and introduced themselves as the Bil-Bil brothers. They had told him how they had once been boys like himself, but had been swallowed by the Rainbow Serpent, a prominent figure that was described as a great creator whom straddled many plains of existence, and were turned into parakeets throughout the whole business when their tribe cut them out of the snake's stomach. Which in turn released the power of creating oneself from one form into another (shape shifting) into the world.

The brothers always tried to help the occasional traveller that the serpent swallowed and spat out, feeling sympathy for others who'd had similar experiences in the belly of the beast, though according to them the snake never spat out anymore parakeets into the Dream, the name of his new location.

Trying to get any other name of where he was bore nothing but mutterings of Dream in various contexts, before he gave up on that. Eventually Harry asked if there was a way out of where ever he was. The parakeets perked at this, and he was lead to a dirt path lined on either side by Gum trees.

They told him to follow the path until he reached a place called The Great Stairs, which would lead him the way out of...wherever he was.

Unfortunately, the brothers weren't inclined to help him further. Their sympathy only went so far, and they thought that mortals were a rather boring lot, preferring to enjoy playing pranks on others in this world.

Still, Harry did feel grateful to the birds, and reached into the pouch with his seeds and handed one to the birds.

"This is peach seed, but don't eat it," he warned them, "when you come to a place that you happen to like, drop it into the dirt and give it space."

The green parakeet took the seed carefully in its beak, and the brothers flew off, while Harry turned to face the road, pulled out a walking stick from inside his, fortunately still functioning bag, and set off.

Ooo ooo ooo

As he traveled, the new Hidden Place that Harry found himself in was vaster then anything he had ever come across before. Three days of constant walking, and the sparse rocky forest gave way to sprawling fields, and still it stretched long and endlessly in the distance. He was beginning to wonder if he would ever find his way out before he celebrated his next birthday.

Harry frowned. He'd found a rather alarming inability to remember the date or days of the week, right along with his inability to yet again use his magic.

He had also realized that the magical items with him were subject to some sort of strange infliction induced by the place as he had lost the magic speedy slippers when they had sprang from his hands and run off all on their own, he'd come to realize that wherever he was, it was rather finicky in making him take the long and hard route.
Despite his setbacks though, he had to admit, that he rather liked the rolling visual scenery of the grasslands that stretched out before him. It was certainly better then the creepy forest. These grasslands were at least temperate and the land was filled with bushes which Harry recognized carried edible berries from his time trekking through the Outback.

Despite it's pleasant look, Harry knew that there was likely some sort of danger or challenge in the swaying waves of green. His sheer dumb luck was rather on the nose with those sorts of things.

After a time, Harry was starting to get tired with all the walking and set about looking for a place to set up his sleeping bag when he heard the sounds in the near distance of men shouting, women laughing, children shrieking in delight, and babies crying.

Harry, leery, but still attracted by the sounds of civilization, made his way to a collection of 20-30 grass huts that were gathered in a loose circle, facing inwards with the occasional small fire nearby, lightening the area against the coming darkness of the evening.

Upon entering the small village though, Harry was surprised to find that it was suddenly very silent, but for the occasional chirp of a cricket, the rustle of grass in a passing breeze, and the crack-snap of wood in the fires.

Harry's fingers trailed towards the handle of the sickle at his side as he wearily eyed the empty huts and the plump grasses that were not flattened by the passage of feet that the earlier sounds had indicated.

"Right, well, this is definitely a red flag," he said to himself, and smartly turned around about to high tail it out of there. Only to find, to his surprise, a man standing in his way.

He was tall and gangling with ink dark skin, but for a patch of pale white on his throat and upper chest. The man smiled genially and bowed his head.

"Greetings young hunter, what brings you to poor Weedah's humble village?".

"Er, I thought I heard people here, but it looks like I was wrong," Harry replied, eyeing the man warily, trying to find a way to edge around him, but the subtle shifts of the man's posture seemed to somehow always block his exit without actually appearing to be doing so.

"Oh yes," the man said sadly, "Weedah's home has only Weedah, no others."

Harry frowned, "then if no one else is here, why did I here the sound of people?"

"You have likely been traveling for a long ways in the hot rays of the sun then being alone in the bush, as the shadows fall, a man breeds strange fancies. See by the light of this fire, where are your fancies now? No women laugh, no babies cry, only I, Weedah, talk. " (6)

Harry felt uncomfortable when the man wore a distinctly despairing look. It did sound rather sad, and Harry felt a flare of compassion despite his misgivings, and the guy looked so desperate for good conversation, that Harry allowed himself to be lead closer to a larger bonfire in the centre of the empty village.

Weedah shared stories of his various hunts while Harry shared stories of some of his adventures, and as they talked, Harry was subtly shifted closer and closer to the fire until finally Harry was feeling distinctly uncomfortable in the increasing heat.

It was then that Harry started to cotton on what was happening as he more carefully paid attention to his host's movements and found that very carefully the man had been herding him closer to the
flames without him realizing it. Harry knew then that at any moment Weedah would strike and he was larger, faster and more skilled then he was, so Harry thought quickly about what to do.

Weedah was just tensing slightly to do just that when Harry suddenly said "Weedah, yes I remember now!" he exclaimed suddenly, "you're the Great Weedah!"

Weedah paused in his grabbing reach and cocked his head curiously, and sounding clearly surprised asked "truly? Others speak of me? what do they say?"

Seeing that the man was properly distracted, Harry shifted his weight slightly and continued to gush "They say that you are the cleverest and mightiest warrior to have ever dug toes into the earth! I am honoured sir!"

Weedah puffed his chest out, and gestured for him to continue.

"Weedah they say." Harry said in an awed hush, causing the enthralled Weedah to lean down closer to the smaller male, "say that you can sweet talk a crocodile into hoping into your belly, and the very stars themselves into your bed, is it really true?"

While Weedah had never really done these things, he did like the sound of these stories about himself, so much so that he readily agreed to their validity and said "of course! Weedah can do all those things indeed!"

Harry portrayed even more awe and asked worshipfully "oh? but how can you do all that? Your tongue must be silvered indeed!"

Weedah, not familiar with this term asked "what does this mean? Silvered tongue?"

Harry looked around shiftyly and gestured the man closer until they were nearly touching noses "where I come from, its well known that only the cleverest, trickiest speaker has a silvered tongue, do you have a silver tongue great Weedah?"

Weedah stuck out his tongue to see if he indeed had such a fine marker, but due to the fact that his eyes were wider set then that of other carnivores and mortal men, he could not see his own tongue.

Seeing his difficulties, Harry offered to look for him and bade Weedah to stick out his tongue, which Weedah obliged eagerly.

Seeing his chance, Harry grabbed Weedah's long thin pointed tongue and with the sickle he'd had stowed at his waist, sliced the appendage off with a quick slice.

Weedah screamed and blood dripped from his mouth, sizzling in the near by flames. While the shocked host rolled around on the ground, clutching his mouth, Harry looked down on his writhing form coldly before he turned and ran away into the darkness.

Harry traveled until sunrise seeing no sign of a vengeful Weedah.

Chapter End Notes

1. The Rainbow Serpent: A prominent figure of Australian Aboriginal myths and legends, particularly tied to Australia's creation myths. 2. The Seven Sisters is an Aboriginal myth tied to the journey of the star cluster known as the Pleiades, in the
constellation Taurus. In one of the variations, the sisters emerged from a sacred lake. In another story two of the sisters were taken as wives by mortals (the dimmer shining ones), the sisters eventually escaped. There is also stories of 7 sisters being chased by a determined man looking to make one of them his wife, chasing them into the sky. I took liberties and combined some of the variations I came across online. 3. In the Aboriginal myth of the rainbow serpent known as Goorialla who consumed two boys. When their tribesmen snuck up on the sleeping serpent and cut into it to free the boys, they had been transformed into two parakeets and flew away. In the ensuing wrath of the serpent, the people ran away, turning into trees and animals to help them escape. 4. The story about the cranes and the owl, is inspired from Aboriginal myths. 5. The word "Dream" as a location, refers to the "Dream time" where Harry currently is. Dream time is "a term devised by early anthropologists to refer to a religio-cultural worldview attributed to Australian Aboriginal beliefs." in this case it is also another state of existence. 6. Weedah: or Weedah the Mockingbird was a figure from Australian myths that created a small grassy village and intimidated the voices of people living there. He would trick hapless travellers and burn them in a bonfire. He was eventually defeated by Mullyan the Eagle Hawk, and from his remains rose the Mocking Bird. The line Weedah says next to the cite is from a translation of the story.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 26: The Boy, Going Down the Road Part 3.

_Somewhere Lost in the Dream..._

Harry had traveled for many days after the incident with the strange man whose tongue he had cut out and possibly killed by either blood loss or bonfire if his writhing had sent him rolling into one.

As he walked, he considered to himself what he felt having possibly killed a man.

He supposed that he was expected to feel bad about taking a life, and some part of him had been...disturbed a bit, maybe, but most of that disquiet came more from how quickly and easily he had done it without second thoughts and without regret more then anything. Some part of him reasoned that he should feel...something, some sort of moral objection perhaps, but all Harry could feel was relief that he had killed the bastard before he had killed him, so Harry eventually just decided to focus on that fact and eventually shrugged it off. There was no point in dwelling on it. Harry was defending himself, that should be good enough reason and moved on.

The grass lands eventually gave way to scraggly bushes, which gave way to hot desert sand. It was so hot in fact that, as he moved steadily what he thought was West, (it was hard to tell as the sun seemed to be rising and setting from different directions each time).

Eventually, the desert gave way from golden sands to golden grasslands and bush, giving a sort of vague impression of an early golden summer setting.

One day when he was enjoying a lunch break with a meat pie from his dwindling supplies, he spotted a passing group of Emu wearing boots to protect their feet...Wait...

Harry froze and stared after them, rubbing his eyes.

Yes, his eyes weren’t deceiving him, he was quite sure that those giant deadly birds were in fact wearing dusty wellingtons.

Grumbling, Harry continued on, and when he spotted a flock of birds flying backwards, he decided that for his own peace of mind he would just keep moving forward and not think about it to closely (1).

Ooo ooo ooo

A few hours later, just as it was finally beginning to cool, the golden setting gave way to cooler tones of greys and blues and brief patches of green. Harry felt relieved when he left the strange fowls and occasional giant barns he spotted from a distance that he decided to ignore since they were off the path and looked like it would take a solid month to round the perimeter of each building. He let out a glad cry when he spotted a waterhole directly on his path.

Harry carefully checked the surrounding area, but didn’t spot anything of notice, and gladly fell down on the rocky shore and dunked his head into the blessedly cool fresh water, groaning in relief.

When he was relativity cooled, he picked his head out of the water and eyed the path. It stopped the
edge of shore then continued on the opposite end some hundred feet across.

It wasn’t a particularly large swim, and Harry reasoned that he was likely still going to be on the path if he kept swimming roughly in-line between the two ends of the path. Harry nodded to himself, and began to strip.

Once all his cloths were off and stored away, Harry set his pack on top of his head and waddled out into the water yipping slightly at the cold, before his body got used to the temperature and felt quite refreshing. He even splashed his back with his tail happily as he traversed the short distance. He swam for a bit, using the excuse of the water in his path to finally take the chance to bath. It felt good to be clean!

He was just nearing the other end of the water hole, enjoying himself, when out from the concealing leaves of a Gum tree, a large blood red lizard with numerous spikes on its back jumped to the ground and ran up to the shore, waving its scaly arms yelling at him.

“Hey you! Get out of there!”

Alarmed, Harry floated a bit backwards, that just seemed to make the odd creature more frantic.

“Are you blinkered!? Don’t go in deeper! Get your giblets out of there before...!”

Harry felt his back bump into something.

Harry slowly turned his head to find two large bulging milky white eyes staring at him from a mass of scales, fur, and an open maw big enough to swallow him whole (2).

Harry yelled and swam like he had never swam before as the creature opened its maw and began sucking up all the water with such force that Harry could feel himself being dragged backward in the current.

He would have gotten sucked in regardless if the red spiky lizard person hadn’t let loose with a boomerang, knocking the creature away just long enough for Harry to scramble to shore.

The attacking creature let out an unholy shriek, rubbing its prominent snout before it sank back beneath the water, muttering curses.

“Well, your lucky,” The lizard commented as it caught its boomerang, stowing it at his hip in a leather belt.

Harry wheezed, “how was I lucky? I nearly got eaten by a water monster!”

“Yeah, well your alive aren’t you? That and that particular Bunyip is a lazy sort, or it would have come out after you.”

Harry eyed the deceptively placid looking waterhole and thought to himself that yes, he was lucky.

Later that same day, Harry invited his rescuer to join him for a bracing cuppa, and the lizard agreed, though suggested that they retire to his campsite which was fortunately along the path. As Harry made tea and the two settled in around the campfire as the sun chose to set (in the North this time), The lizard introduced himself as Oolah (3).

Oolah was on a journey of redemption. He described how one day, while he had been practicing with his boomerang to stave off his boredom, he had been visited by Galah, a beautiful bird that Oolah admitted he became rather enamored of from a distance over time. In an effort to show off,
he’d added an extra twist to his release of this boomerangs and in the process on the return, accidentally sliced the top of Galah’s head off.

Oolah had been horrified by what he had done and frightened by the maddened agony of his infatuation, and unable to cope had run and hid under a bush. Galah had followed him and attacked him in his hiding place, seizing him and rolling him in the stiff thorns until they punctured deep into his back, still maddeningly, horribly shrieking.

When Galah had finally died, Oolah in his sorrow and remorse had painted himself in the blood from the wound and taken on the colour as a permanent part of himself, turning red. The spines he was cursed to forever carry in his back.

His actions had caused strife between their two tribes, and to appease Galah’s grieving parents, he was banished. Since then he had been looking for a way to atone for what he had done, sometimes working as a servant for one of the various denizens of the Dream, sometimes saving the odd hapless fellow like Harry from danger and so forth.

The two continued to converse long into the night, until they both retired for a companionable sleep.

When Oolah had awoken the next morning, it was to find that Harry had already left, but in a small envelop, Harry had left a message and a peach pit.

*I can’t say that I can related to what you have been through, but I think your a good person (lizard person?). I think that this Gallah person you cared for would have agreed with me.*

*When you believe it to, plant this seed and eat the fruit from its branches. I hope it helps.*

*Harry.*

Ooo ooo ooo

The landscape soon began to become rockier and Harry was very much wishing he could fly right about now, while at the same time thankful for those times he had ignored his flight capabilities to rock climb.

It wasn’t long until Harry realized that he found himself trying very hard not to get lost in what had to be the largest most complicated maze-like canyon he’d ever had the misfortune to not be able to fly over.

The path continued to take him deeper and deeper into the heart of jutting stone, bottomless pits, and gleaming minerals of all shades and colours, muted by dusting of shadows, thick and thin, as the sunlight was blocked by the rock.

There were other things in this place instead of rock.

Flashes of gold high in the sky often caught his eye. Giant Eagles with gold and white plumage bigger then a bus circled lazily over head. A few of them would occasionally spot Harry’s movements and dive at him, lethal talons extended, and Harry had been forced time and again to squeeze himself in whatever shelter he could and wait for the bird to lose interest before moving on (4).

At one point, the path gone in the direction of a cave opening. Harry had been relieved by not having to worry about the giant birds, but not long venturing steadily inwards, he began to notice movement on either side of him in the inky darkness just out of reach of his flashlight.
A sweep of the beam and Harry’s heart nearly stopped in startled fear when he spotted a bunch of tall, exceptionally then bipedal creatures that watched him eerily from crevices deep within the stone. Fortunately they didn’t seem bothered by him, but if he ventured to close open or two would swipe at him with a racket-like club and Harry would correct himself (5).

It was extremely creepy and he was almost glad to go back to worrying about giant golden eagles when he stepped back out into the dim sunlight.

The only other odd thing he encountered during his stint through the maze was the evidence of other people who had stumbled into this place.

This was from the presence of two skeletons in raggedy remains of what had once been nice old fashioned white dresses, clutching at each other, resting in a shallow hole just along side the path (6).

The only clue Harry had to who they had been was a golden locket that was dangling from a sharp jut of rocks at the edge of the hole. When Harry picked it up, an inscription on the inside read:

To my Dearest Miranda, Yours Sara.

There was a faded picture of a group of girls standing outside a school house dressed in white frilly turn of the 20th century cloths. Harry pulled out a small knife and carefully etched a series of symbols into the casing in the off chance that the spirits of the girls might be hanging around, and gently set the locket back where he had found it.

That sobering sight was the marker to the other side of the rocky canyon and he exited the place with no small amount of relief.

ooo ooo ooo

Sometime later...

At the edge of a forest a stocky bright red creature that looked like a cross between a devil and a toad snored contentedly under the shade of its favorite hunting tree.

The creature shifted slightly in its sleep, snores loud in the lazy warmth of an afternoon sun. Out of the bushes another just like the first creature stumbled out, clutching its belly and looking distinctly ill. The ill creature shook the former awake, who squinted beady round eyes open in annoyance at the disturbance to its nap.

“Now why did you have to go and wake me then?” the first creature grumbled in annoyance, yawning. “I’m sleeping off a Crocodile I ate for Breakfast you know.”

“I think I’ve gone and done it Larl,” The ill one groaned, “I’ve eaten something poisonous this time I know it.”

Larl rolled his eyes, “We’re Yara-ma-yha-who Prag, there’s not much that upsets the stomach of one of us, so stop going all hypochondriac on me and leave me to my nap” (7).

He was about to do just that when all of a sudden, his companion let out a horrible screech, and Larl’s eyes snapped open and his own screech filled the small wooded glade of fig trees as he beheld a bloody hand with a sharp dagger sticking out of the red bloated stomach.

Larl remained frozen, pressed against a tree trunk as one arm became two and were joined by a gasping head, then with a wet pop! A fully formed naked body covered in blood and digestive fluids burst out of the twitching corpse.
Larl immediately became so horrified and nauseated by the sight, that he regurgitated his own dinner. A dazed crocodile staggered away on stubby legs.

“Bloody hell!” Harry grumped, can’t a bloke enjoy a bath without some arse head trying to eat him?” The pre-teen stomped away, muttering curse words back to his camp.

The rest of the time in the small glade, Harry was left conspicuously alone.

ooo ooo ooo

Harry was thirsty, but then again, who wasn’t around this place?

The path had lead him to a vast dry riverbed so wide he could barely see the other end of it. Or at lest he thought it might have been an impressive river once, as it was so dried up, the bottom was cracked and peeling red clay interspersed with the bone white skeletons of fish, crocodiles, and things Harry was rather glad to not see alive.

The path when directly over the edge and directly through the heart of it, so shrugging, Harry hitched his bag and set off.

It wasn’t a quarter of the way across when his skin began to dry, and his tongue felt like sandpaper.

Gasping, he pulled out a bottle of water from his pack and opened the top to take a drink, only before the water could touch his lips, it suddenly vanished.

Harry tried moist fruit, a can of soup, but as soon as it was opened, all moisture was immediately sucked away.

By the time Harry was barely half way across, his lips were cracked and even the blood that welled evaporated.

Harry staggered and fell to his knees gasping in thirst. Harry was beginning to wonder if he was going to die in this place.

Then the ground began to rumble, and the rumbling grew in greater vibration. Something huge was moving in his direction. It wasn’t long before the sun was blocked out. Harry looked up and up blurrily as a large round green bolder the size of the Eiffel tower rolled in his direction.

As it rolled, it made a thunderous SLOSH-SLOSH sound as if a tidal wave were about to hit.

Harry didn’t have the energy to move, knowing it would be fruitless anyway, considering the boulder’s sides bulged out on either end of the river, he would never make it.

The giant green bolder didn’t continue to roll though. It stopped a foot from Harry’s bent over form.

Harry blinked when he came eye to eye with a bulbous face. In fact, now that he had a closer look at it, the surface of the green bolder looked more scaly skin then rock. He could even see two front webbed feet sticking out from below the face.

This was no bolder but a giant frog!

The creature’s face sat ridiculously small in proportion to its giant body, like a tiny zit on one’s face. Then the creature opened its mouth and began to make sucking noises. Humid air erupted around Harry and he could even distinguish little droplets of water and he realized that the creature was sucking away the very moisture from his body!
His keen mind whirled. He pulled his last sealed bottle of water and opened the cap. Sure enough, the creature made greedier sucking noises and the water instantly disappeared into its gullet, confirming his assessment of his latest “oh-shit!” situation.

Harry knew he needed to do something quick before he was turned into a raisin. But what could he do against a giant moisture sucking frog?

Harry poked the frog hesitantly.

The green skin bent inward like a water balloon. The giant frog seemed unbothered, more interested in sucking moisture out of the air.

What he needed to do, Harry mused along the lines of that comparison, was pop this giant balloon.

He was just considering how best to do that, when his poking, about an inch below one of the stubby front legs, caused the frog to stop sucking. It made a disturbed croaking noise and Harry was startled with a face full of water.

Harry gaped, spluttering. He was dry quickly though when the frog then began sucking inwards again, re-absorbing the moisture it had lost.

Harry experimentally poked the spot again and the same thing happened, only this time Harry was able to discern a clear, brief, giggle.

Harry was hit with an utterly ridiculous idea, but at the moment he had no choice. Shrugging, because he had nothing better to lose, he reached up with both hands and began to tickle the giant frog under the arms.

The double, sustained onslaught was to much for the frog who let loose with uncontrollable laughter.

A wall of water descended on him and Harry knew no more after that.

An hour later...

Harry groaned as he came to. He froze when he found himself looking up into the faces of a wide variety of animals. Eagles, swans, Platypus, Buffalo, Wild horses, Koala’s, etc. On his chest, perched a large stern looking owl.

“You are very lucky creature-not-of-here, we thought you dead, whoo-whoooo!” the owl spoke.

Harry made a mental note to add Owls to his no-eat list, and replied, a little dazedly, “Yeah, a frog laughing up a tidal wave will do that to a person.”

“We the various tribes of this area are in your debt. Every time we have been dealing with Tiddalik (8) and his water draining ways, we have had to come up with newer and newer material to make him laugh to release the water. I have to admit, for all my wisdom, I did not think of tickling, whooo.”

The others chimed in their appreciation. The owl claimed that they had found his body down river and had pulled him out. They had thought him dead at first, for surely how could one lone human boy survive something like that?

Harry had to agree. How had he survived that?

No one had an answer to that, and after refilling his water bottles, Harry was guided back to the path.
by his helpful and grateful rescuers and continued on his journey.

Ooo ooo ooo

The next place Harry found himself in was hard to describe. Mainly because it was overcast, dim and covered in thick fog.

His flashlight didn’t do much to cut through the mist, and he pulled out his favourite staff, keeping it at the ready.

It was disturbingly quiet where he was as well. He didn’t hear the chatter of speaking and non-speaking animals. No wind through leaves or bone brittle branches.

The path was smooth before him as well. Flat without any accent to denote soil, incline or even loose stone. All there was was the hint of waist high ash grey grass on either side of him.

Nothing rustled, nothing moved, and as he traversed. Harry’s heart thundered loudly to his ears in his chest, his body was so stiff with tension that he could feel his bones and muscles creak as he moved. His breath barely fell past his lips, lungs feeling goggled with cold anticipation, like being caught on the verge of a ready scream.

Each to loud scrap foot fall forward was a subtle jab in waiting for something to happen.

Only...nothing did.

By the end of it, Harry couldn’t understand why nothing had happened, and wished during his trek that something would, because that...that had been the most terrifying experience of his life, and yet, looking back on it years later, he could not describe exactly why he had been afraid in the first place.

Ooo ooo ooo

When Harry finally cleared the last wisps of fog, it was, to his surprise, to find an old run down looking castle sat at the base of a mountain. Great black birds cawed random bits of gossip at each other:

“Cawwww! Good worms to the south! Caaaw!”

“Caaaw! New chicks to feed never stop wailing! Caaaww!”

“Ca-ca-ca-caaaw! So that’s why you look tuckered then! Ca-ca-ca.”

Harry’s followed the path’s steadily rising trail up and upwards still, and he groaned when he saw that the doorway of the castle sat directly in front of it, the path disappearing inside.

“Well damn,” he sighed, imagining all sorts of potential creepy-crawlies investing the walls.

All to soon he found himself before to door. He debated knocking on the slightly rotted wood, but to his consternation and no little amount of trepidation, the door opened, though without the creak he had been expecting.

From what he could see of the interior, it was worn down, and dusty in spots, but not as dilapidated as the outside appeared. In fact, there was even a cozy looking little light in the distance. Harry shivered as a waft of warmth trailed over his mist dampened cloths, reminding him of just how cold it was outside.

“Well are you just going to stand there all day or are you going to come in already?” a gruff voice
grunted.

Harry jumped at the sudden surprising voice and looked down to find a scruffy brown dog with a creamy white muzzle.

“Well?” the dog said testily.

“Er, sure if you don’t mind,” Harry replied and slipped past the door, not feeling reassured when it closed silently behind him, the click of the lock loud in his ears.

Harry hesitantly followed the canine, hand gripping his staff tightly.

The dog lead him into a sitting room that was just as old and worn as the castle, but was warm and well used. There before a warm fireplace near by a rug to which the dog unceremoniously flopped onto, was a thin old man with wild grey hair, large ears, and patchy ragged robes. Then the man spoke.

“When people told themselves their past with stories, explained their present with stories, foretold the future with stories, the best place by the fire was kept for The Storyteller,” (9) the man beckoned with a hand, and out of nowhere another faded though comfortable looking easy chair appeared before the fire, beckoning him to sit, “though I admit, I am usually the one who bares that title and that empty spot kept courtesy for my potential arrival at any fireside, it is so rarely that the roles are reversed.”

Harry took a hesitant seat, and leaning against his staff eyed the other curiously. At first he had thought him a man, perhaps another who had been unceremoniously swallowed by a giant snake and dumped in this place, but as he observed the man, pottering around with a kettle and a few slices of bread with cheese roasting by the edge of the fire being set into plates, he noticed that there was something in the shape of the large ears, the fold of skin along the temples, the ease of movement despite his seeming advanced age...or was it advanced? There was something ageless about him at the same time.

His host handed him cheese bread and a cup of exceptionally strong coffee.

Harry, who was down to the last dregs of food from his stock pile and been subsisting with the occasional berries (to afraid to hunt anything here because apparently here all the animals talked).

Harry took the offered food gratefully, though made sure to keep an eye on the man’s hands the entire time and made sure the man began eating and drinking first before he dove in.

Noticing this, The Storyteller mused, “You must have man interesting stories your self to wear such caution when dining with another.”

Harry shrugged, “I’ve not really been poisoned or anything like that, but I’ve sat around sketchy fires as well as friendly.”

The man raised an interested eyebrow, “My, my, what an eventful life you must lead.”

Harry hummed, “I guess that’s one way to look at it. Considering how I got here in the first place.”

“Oh?”

“Swallowed by a giant snake actually. I’m trying to get to this place called The Great Stairs, I was told by a pair of parakeets that it was the only way I could get back to where I came from.”
“How long have you been travelling the path laid out before you?” his host asked curiously.

Harry chewed thoughtfully then replied “I...am not sure. There are times where it feels like only a few days have past, then there are times where I feel as if it has been years.”

“That is the nature of dreaming young traveller. We can dream entire lifetimes in the space of a few breaths, or dream our entire lives away while awake without doing anything at all. That is the nature of The Dream.”

Harry frowned thoughtfully. It didn’t make much sense to him.

“Imagination is the fodder and will of dreaming you see. Fodder to which our unconscious will exerts over our conscious one like a sneak thief in the dark, and in tides of forces that wax and wane, dawn and set. Will is the agency of Consciousness, the will, whether mad or sane, to enact possibilities and either leave them harmless fancies, or attempt to make them real to suit our day to day needs and goals.”

Harry’s frown deepened as his mind pondered the words, then his brow cleared and he stared at the man with something between doubt and horror, “Are you saying that the only reason I haven't reached The Great Stairs is because I...but that’s just silly!”

“No one says dreaming is entirely sensible,” The Storyteller intoned dryly.

“But then...that would mean that...this entire time that I have been wandering around this place, following an endless path through danger after danger, was because I...did this to myself?!” the last was a horrified squeak.

The dog chortled from around his bone.

Harry slumped back in the chair nearly faint with his outrage.

“You subconsciously expected to face hardship and trial, and the Dream gave you exactly what you wanted, taking you along the path that you set yourself, brick by brick.”

“But the parakeet brothers told me I needed to follow the path to get to the Great Stairs!” Harry exclaimed.

“True, but then everyone walks a path in this place, and like many heroes that you heard in stories, you were afraid to venture away from the road, head forward, not looking back like Orpheus, for fear of losing the face of what you desire. But sometimes stories, as dear as they are, can be right for some and wrong for others.”

The man leaned forward, and meant Harry’s eyes, “What if I were to tell you that should you leave the path, which in your case conveniently twists into my sitting room and right through my fireplace,” he gestured to the visible line of discoloration between Harry’s path and the dusty stone floor, which lead, sure enough, directly into the roaring flames, before he pointed towards an arch filled with darkness completely off the path at the far end of the room.

“You could continue to follow this path, you face the flames head on as is expected for young unsure protagonists. You may or may not burn, and afterwards if you do not, it may even lead you there, eventually I suppose, and perhaps you wont get burned along the way, or perhaps you will. Or you can step off the path, shun the heroic expectations, and go through that arch and be at your destination in but a blink, or you could fall to your death, or merely find a messy kitchen in desperate need of a good wash.”
The dog stopped chewing on his bone with interest as he watched their visitor get hesitantly to his feet and stared down at the edge of the path. Harry looked at the path towards the fire, then the looming arch.

Then the two watched as their guest seemed to struggle for a moment, almost leaning towards the direction of the flame, before hesitating, then slowly turning away and took a step off the path and set about purposefully walking away from it.

To his surprise though, instead of going through the arch, the boy instead paused half way, turned a sharp left, and without further ado, he thanked The Storyteller for his hospitality, gave him a peach, and climbed out of a nearby window.

The dog cocked his head in confusion, “What just happened? I thought for sure he would go through the arch.”

The Storyteller however lay the peach aside looking pleased, scratching his companion behind the ear and said “The paths we take my friend can either be laid for us, either by what we think is expected of us or by others, or we can lay our own. The window was never an option, but it was truly his choice.”

The dog grumbled, returning to his bone.

The Storyteller smiled again, pulling out a pipe and settled in for a relaxing smoke before bed.

Chapter End Notes

1. The Speewah: A mythical place in Australian folklore/tall tales it “is a mythical Australian station that is the subject of many tall tales told by Australian bushmen. The stories of the Speewah are Australian folktales in the oral tradition.” (wiki). It is also setting for a short film based on the stories of Crooked Mick, and a painting by Arthur Streeton called Impressions of a Golden Summer. Birds flying backwards was said to be an indicator you entered the mythical place. 2. A Bunyip: “is a large mythical creature from Australian Aboriginal mythology, said to lurk in swamps, billabongs, creeks, riverbeds, and waterholes.” 3. Oolah: from “The Galah, and Oolah the Lizard” in Australian Legendary Tales. I used components from both the story and made up stuff as I went along (the romantic and redemptive elements for example). 4. The giant golden Eagles are from Disney's Rescuers Downunder, a really great animated film. 5. Mimi: "The Mimi are tall, thin beings that live in the rocky escarpment of northern Australia as spirits. Before the coming of Aboriginal people they had human forms. The Mimi are dangerous if approached the wrong way, it may kick, knee, slap, smash with a racket like object or sit on someone; which causes sometimes fatal injuries."When Aboriginal people first came to northern Australia, the Mimi taught them how to hunt and cook kangaroos and other animals. They also did the first rock paintings and taught Aboriginal people how to paint." (Australian Museum Article/Wiki). 6. the skeletons are allusions to two missing girls from a group that went missing at Hanging rock from the Australian film Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975). 7. Yara-ma-yha-who are Australian Aboriginal mythical creatures wait for an unsuspecting travellers to linger under trees. After that it consumes the person, it takes a nap. When awakens, it regurgitates the victim, and can leave size differences and colour changes, though in this case the story is tweaked. He doesn’t physically change shape or colour, and his blood doesn’t get
sucked out. 8. Tiddalik is a frog from Australian mythology that swallowed all the water of a great river, affecting the other animals. To get him to release the water, the wise owl and a bunch of animals devised a plan to make the frog laugh. Which they did by an eel contorting its body to the frog’s amusement, until he released all the water in his laughter.

9. The Storyteller, dog, and setting is from the Jim Henson television series The Storyteller. The line he greets Harry with is from the opening sequence of the show. 10. Orpheus was a great musician from Greek legend. When he lost the love of his life, Eurydice, he went into the underworld to retrieve her. He managed to get her, but the only way he could keep her, according to Hades, was to walk forward without looking behind himself or he would lose her forever. He did look back though and failed to bring her back and was eventually later killed by Thracian Maenads.
Harry would never look at stairs the same way again.

He had been climbing gleaming rainbow scaled stairs that at times seemed to undulate as if they were breathing, or shifting idly in slumber. He had been climbing arduously for so long that he had at one point reckoned hours, then days, then hours, and then days again. He had yet to see the top of the stairs end, still seemingly somehow a blur in the distance above him writhed in clouds, and had been afraid to look behind him, unsure if his sanity would be able to handle evidence that he had not gone very far at all.

Eventually he had eaten up all the berries, insects, and fish that he had gathered in his travels. He grew so hungry that he resorted to the only thing he had left on him, which was the somehow still eerily fresh tongue he'd cut from the mouth of the man who had tried to burn him alive what seemed like a lifetime ago.

Despite his initial disgust, Harry was still at his core practical enough that his distaste was no excuse to pass up needed sustenance, so he grit his teeth and shoved the entire slimy thing into his mouth and chewed.

It's smooshy flesh burst onto his own tongue and the taste of copper and smoked almonds filled his mouth, and it was all he could do to refrain from gagging as he forced himself to swallow every bit of it, and shivered in repulsion.

Despite how truly squicked he was about his little...snack, it seemed to have been just the ticket as his stomach stopped grumbling. In fact, he felt rejuvenated and oddly full from such a seemingly small piece of flesh.

Harry grit his teeth and began moving with greater determination.

He was not going to die here, he was going to succeed! and when he did, he was going to gargle an entire bottle of mouth wash and eat a giant tub of ice cream, and perhaps indulge in a little underage drinking.

Vow to himself made, he refused to look up to his destination and instead just focused on the repetitive pattern of rainbow scales in the stair and hissed to himself.

:I am not going to die here, I am not going to die here, I am not going to die here...:

He continued to climb even as his muscles burned, his fingers and feet bled, and his vision was
shrouded in exhausted blankness. Regardless, he continued to move unceasingly, shoving one foot in front of the other, ignoring his heart's plead for mercy, pretended that his knee caps had not been turned to jelly and told them to stop fooling around and get to work.

At some point in this state of forever, his body was pushed one point to hard and collapsed, bleeding, creaking, cracking, gasping and wheezing.

He knew he wasn’t going to be able to move any further, and so he did the only thing he could do at the moment, he fell into an exhausted slumber for a long time.

There is no singular way to tell how long he remained thus. it could have been a blink between one intake of his breath to when exhale, or the infinite slow blink of a universe born and fallen and born again. other travelers could have come to and fro, observing with pity, ignorance, compassion, or disinterest to the pre-teen curled up on the back of the world.

But as is the case for all dreamers, eventually you wake up to start anew.

When he regained consciousness, limbs trembling, it was to find himself lying on a smooth flat expanse of glittering marble. Beside him the tip most of a rainbow scaled tail rested on the edge of his resting place.

He blinked dumbly, trembling fingers trailing over gleaming dark, interspersed with what looked like trembling pinpricks of stars, whose light rippled under his awed touch.

Harry couldn't help the grin that split his face, the wordless exultation that erupted from his dry throat, a painful yet euphoric experience.

Then he cried for a very long time, tears and snot falling onto the grand celestial foyer, which was primly absorbed from sight as was proper for such grandeur, which then made Harry laugh like a loon.

He was surprised that the was able to move by the time he got hold of enough of his senses to go for the next step, moving forward. His limbs felt oddly light as he got to his feet. Harry was unsure if it was the fuel of pure adulterated relief or if he had somehow healed in his repose, but didn't dwell on it for long as he practically skipped deeper into the sanctuary.

All around him there was a great arched tunnel of blackness interspersed with constellations, planets, galaxies, even the barest hint of what could be creatures swimming in the dark spaces between the light. Harry was struck silent in awe, each of his steps caused ripples in the floor, and when he reached another pavilion, this one an odd misty color, though he could not say which color exactly, he looked behind him to find that the universe in the marble looked...different. Disturbed for a reason he could not rightly explain, some deep instinct told him to not leave one of his magic seeds in this place, he shivered and hastily moved forward inside the misty-marble-like corridor.

He was startled suddenly to find himself standing inside an infinitive cosmic cone of, for lack of a better description, holes. To his surprise, the things that had not traveled with him, or lost along the way, were waiting for him in a neat pile, which he gratefully slung onto his body.

Harry soon found himself facing another problem. The room was an infinite multi-layered latices of labyrinths, upside downs that should be right side ups, and no clear definition of edges, like a puzzle without any side pieces.

Harry swallowed deeply, intimidated, but he was still determined to return to his world. So, with no help for it, he approached the closest hole.
above the rim, or below, was the same repeated words which, helpfully reformed themselves into English, informing him.

*Keep most of your hands and legs on this side of the gateway, until you've found your destination. No take backs.*

Deciding to take that warning literally, Harry refrained from sticking any of his limbs through the arch, which displayed some sort of cave filled with junk, and used his head instead.

The act of sticking his head through was thankfully not a fatal decision. There was a delicate warning tingle along his neck to remind him where the, for lack of a better word, membrane of the gateway connected to, what Harry decided to mentally call, the Nexus.

Fortunately for Harry's health, the gate provided a protective covering over his head it appeared, because it didn't take him long to realize he was looking in on an underwater cave. He blinked then flushed when he spotted a shell-bra'd mermaid with long red hair singing about wanting more. She didn't seem to notice, his presence, being positioned a bit higher up, but he did startle a red crab that shouted in what sounded like a Jamaican accent for some reason when he happened to look up and spot the floating glowing disembodied head. Harry hastily retreated (10).

Harry meandered around for a time, sticking his head from time to time through a gate out of curiosity.

ooo ooo ooo

A great horrendous tower bathed in the darkest of power riddled with greed and longing, held an all seeing eye of flames. The Great Sauron was the master of this tower where he relentlessly searched for the key to his power, the one ring to rule them all, occasionally designing to turn his gaze downwards to his fawning orcs who bowed under the crush of his dark glory.

Sauron was just stirring in Mordor, the power of his ring having finally begun to move into the hands of those who would lead it back to him. HIs Nazgul were already turning in their chained coffins.

Soon, oh yes, soon....

There was only one time where Sauron was temporarily distracted by his blood drenched scheming and that was when, out of nothingness, a s disembodied head popped up directly in front of Sauron's great eye.

The two blinked at each other wordlessly, before the disembodied head grumbled, "Well fuck this," and seemed to retreat into nothingness.

Saruon hissed.

"Wha...?"

The brief mysterious encounter would eat in the background of Sauron's mind, long after the war began and he became distracted with more important things.

(1)

ooo ooo ooo

A young boy in a wheel chair was happily coloring at the dinner table when a floating head popped out of his mother's apple pie.
"Ti-Timmy!" the boy exclaimed in shock and yelled out to his parents, "TIM-TIMMY!"

Startled the head disappeared from whence it came.

No one believed Timmy's story, though Jimmy thought it was quite the hilarious set up to a truly amazing stand up comedy act and applauded his friend's creativity.

(2)

ooo ooo ooo

"Hey Mr. J?" Harely Quinn, the Joker's faithful minion an main squeeze exclaimed from deep in the lair, "There's a floating head stickin' outta the oven."

Joker was crouched over his work station diligently working on the plans for his latest hilarious romp in bringing down either Gotham City or the Batman, or both, He was wondering if the Giant Missile laughing Kewpie doll might be a little to ostentatious when Harley's continued "Mr. J?"'s distracted the criminal mastermind from his valuable work.

Gritting his teeth he hollered over his shoulder.

"Harley I am trying to work! Just hit it with a mallet or something. Stop disturbing me."

"O..okay Puddin'" the blond pig-tailed Harlequin woman sighed and pulled out a giant lethal novelty mallet from no where.

The floating head disappeared just before the mallet came crashing down with a yelp.

Harley snapped her fingers, "darn, missed."

(3)

ooo ooo ooo

A balding man in a suit jacket, with a goatee was being scared silly by what looked like a demonic Teddy Ruxpun.

Neither party noticed the bodiless head sticking out from a nearby couch, which grumped "nope," before disappearing.

"Hey was that a floating head in the couch cushions?" Tamera asked Cinema Snob, both individuals sleeping over in the same house pulling all-nighter's on a collab, and were passing by the entrance to the living room holding steaming mugs of coffee, Doug was currently busy dodging Teddy as he pulled out a large butcher knife.

"I don't know, I've seen so much horrible b-movie horror movie/sometimes porno/snuff films, that i sometimes see cheesy film premises in real life," CinemaSnob drawled.

"Fair enough," Tamera hummed, "come on, I need help with that Garfield's Christmas Tree Tamera's Never Seen."

"I'd rather watch a couch possessed by a ghost head," CinemaSnob complained, "Oh well."

"Oh come on!" Doug exclaimed as he dodged a swipe and reached for the flame thrower by the Christmas tree.
Back in the Nexus...

Harry was beginning to grow desperate.

Every gate he examined seemed to be...wrong.

Some were obvious, like that creepy world with weird big headed doll children with adult voices hugging each other and watering their young by a babbling brook. Other's looked relativity normal looking like that burger place where some random man with straight shoulder length dreadlocks and a big smile who kept saying "Welcome to Good Burger, home of the Good Burger! Can I take your order?" which got old very fast, though the burgers did smell pretty good (5)(6).

Harry shivered when he remembered the one gateway that featured an odd orange skinned creature that Harry assumed was some sort of troll of all things, wearing some sort of fox pelt on his head and was sitting behind an important looking desk drinking a bottle of water with both hands occasionally as his thumbs flew over his cellphone. Harry had received a phone in the face with his l when the man caught sight of him sticking out of a stack of untouched files and binders in his Inn box and threw it at him, shrieking and reaching for a nearby golf club. That particular encounter had left him with a strangely disturbed feeling, like he had witnessed something that by all logic shouldn't have been (7).

Though it was seeing a certain familiar looking bird painted in the floor, something he vaguely remembered from a magazine he had read once, that cemented his suspicion that he was indeed catching glimpses of not just a variety of different places, but different dimensions.

Harry couldn't explain how he knew the difference between what he was looking at as not his world, but another, but he decided to stick with his gut, though he was worried, what with him being short on supplies, how long he could keep up with his aimless wandering. Eventually he knew he would be forced to just choose the most viable looking option and content himself with his choice and leaving his own reality behind him for good.

Harry sighed, setting in front of a gateway which showed a colorful bakery filled with pastries. The sight of all that sugary confectionery made his stomach growl unhappily. Well, at least without anything to eat he didn't have to worry about a bathroom. He had a sneaky suspicion it would not be a good idea to pee on another dimension.

This time Harry's head seemed to have emerged from the side of a giant pink and purple cake.

Harry was wondering if he was being some how taunted. Sadly, while the smell of warm chocolate fudge pastry and cheesecake frosting filled his nostrils, the gate membrane protecting his head didn't allow for him to take anything back with him, such as a bite of that mouth watering confectionery...

Harry's audible groan caught the attention of the shopkeeper who stuck her head from the back kitchen.

Harry stared, his mouth dropped open, when his green eyes met bright excitable blue eyes, the owner of which was a bright pink Pony with curly candy floss mane and tail (8).

instead of reacting in fear or violence to the presence of a floating head sticking out of the side of a cake, the pink pony began to bounce excitedly, "Oh wow! a Dimensional Traveler! how exciting!"
Harry blinked, gobsmacked. The pink pony knew what was going on?! Hell he didn't understand half of what was happening.

"Urm," Harry coughed lightly interrupting her excited chatter, "I'm kind of, um, lost. Can you tell me how i can get home?"

"Hmmm..." the mare who had introduced her self as Pinkie Pie tapped her muzzle thoughtfully with a hoof as she leaned in close to examine him, craning her head this way and that, and one or twice licking random spots on his face and head.

She nodded to herself, "Wow, you are super duper lost!"

"Yeah," Harry agreed with a sigh.

Pinkie hummed, "Well, no help for it then, Gummy! My scissors!" out of the pony's mane a toothless baby alligator popped out holding a pair of fancy looking metal scissors with mysterious symbols carved into the handles and Pinkie pie's name etched into the side.

"I don't normally use them, but you are reeeeeeeeeealy outside my usual powers of dimensional wall breaking. Lucky for u I have these babies," she dangled the scissors using a prehensile curl of mane, now just grab this in your teeth and pull." (11)

Harry did as he was instructed, surprised when the tip of the scissors actually went through the membrane as if it wasn't there, and carefully closing his teeth on the oddly cold, slightly buzzy metal, he pulled his head backwards and Pinky, who had a grip on the handle with her own teeth calmly stepped through the gateway.

She looked around, hopping excitedly, "Wow! the Hub of the Multiverse! how totally awesome! Twilight would be so jealous," Gummy croaked from deep inside Pinky's mane profoundly.

"Now then," she turned to Harry starring at him keenly, "Wow you remind me of a friend of mine, his name is Dusk, you guys have the exact same eyes, though he's better looking."(9)

She turned to back to observing their surroundings occasionally sticking her head into random gateways, one of which scared the shit out of what looked like an octopus working in a fast food joint. Pinky giggled (12).

"Wow, this is fun, I usually don't take the extra step when I wander the multiverse and bend space and time," she rolled her eyes like it was all some fun joke, "but these puppies should help us find where you need to go."

She handed him the scissors with her teeth and harry held the slightly damp scissors in his right hand gingerly.

"Now, normally you can just cut your self a whole in the dimensional barrier with these puppies, but they don't work in The Hub, but you can use them like a sort of compass to guide you the right way. So just close your eyes, think of your world, wiggle your little tush, and bounce in the direction that they scissors tug you to."

Harry, blushing, followed Pinkie Pie's directions, and was surprised when he felt a sharp tug in his hand. He bounced after the pull, Pinkie's squeals of "Fun! Fun!" directly behind him the only sign that she was bouncing along with him.

Harry's eyes were closed and to busy paying attention to the tug of the scissors that he didn't notice the random man dressed in red and black with weapons strapped to his person, who was meandering
between gates. Pinky waved at the other dimensional traveler. She pulled a sign out of no where.

*Hey Deadpool! where you heading this time?*

Deadpool pulled his own sign out of nowhere, politely not distracting the main protagonist of this story by speaking out-loud.

*Another Spideypool-verse!* Deadpool turned the sign, *So busy since my movie came out and Ryan Reynold's fine ass became mine.*

Pinkie Pie flipped her sign around displaying a thumbs up.

Deadpool shot her his own thumbs up, tossed his sign aside, pulled on a maid's apron, drew his swords and dived into one of the nearby gates (13)(14).

The Harry opened his eyes and stopped bouncing when the scissors stopped pulling at him.

Harry found himself standing in front of a gateway that showed a sweeping forest of tall pines and rocky terrain with patches of frost gleaming on the rocks and dead shrub grass.

"Well here you are," the pink pony said happily, still bouncing in place.

"It doesn't look like where I last was," Harry hummed, leaning close and scratching his chin.

"Well duh," Pinky rolled her eyes, "You never end up in the exact same place you started out in, but the scissors are never wrong."

Harry stuck his head in through the gate, the scent of cool clean air filled his nostrils and he suddenly was filled with an overwhelming sense of rightness.

He pulled his head back and turned his head, and said thankfully, with tears in his eyes, "Thank you, thank you for helping me."

"Aww, its okay, this was fun!"

Harry paused and then thought 'why not?' he reached into the bag on his neck and pulled out a pit, wrapped it in a spare bit of cloth and handed it carefully to Pinkie "Plant this wherever you want, when you get back, and an magical fruit tree will appear."

"Wow! that's cool! I bet Zecora would love it for her birthday, A forest hermit is so hard to shop for! Thanks!"

Harry hugged the pony, overwhelmed in his gratitude and relief.

Pinky patted his back with a hoof, "Awww, its alright," she pushed him briskly towards the gate, "you better get moving before h gate moves its self."

Harry's eyes widened "They do that?!"

"Yep!"

"Ack!" Harry exclaimed, said a hasty good bye and leapt through the gateway.

Pinkie Pie hopped away, feeling good about this little side adventure. She wondered if she should tell Dusk about meeting one of his counterparts?
After some thought she decided not to. Some ponies can be a little distressed about having their sense of reality drastically warped for some reason. Maybe she would tell Discord when he came for his weekly cupcakes.

Chapter End Notes

1. Reference to a character, Sauron, from the Lord of the Rings Trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien.
2. Timmy is a character from the American adult animation series South Park.
3. The Joker and Harley, antagonists from the DC Universe.
4. Individuals and references from Channel Awesome’s Nostalgia Critic and other productions by CA.
5. From an obscure bad kid’s film form the 80’s that is still kind of hilarious called Hugga Bunch.
6. Reference to a comedy sketch of the same name featured on the Nickelodeon series All That.
7. Guess, lol.
8. Pinkie Pie is a character from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic series. She is well known for defying the laws of physics, space and time and within fandom works has done a fair bit of dimension hopping. 9. Disk is the pontified version of Harry Potter in one of my other fanfics titled Arrived at Dusk over at fanfiction.net and fimfiction under the same username.
10. Disney’s The Little Mermaid references.
11. The Dimensional Scissors are a reference from Star vs. The Forces of Evil series, I will leave it to your imaginations how Pinky got a pair, lol.
12. The unfortunate hardworking squid was Squidward from the series Spongebob Squarepants.
13. Deadpool is a character from the Marvel Universe, also well known for breaking various forms of dimensional barriers, especially during his killing the entirety of the Marvel Universe and all even all the way back to classic inspiration in the Killustrated Deadpool series.
14. Spideypool is the portmanteau of the ship Spiderman/Deadpool one of the most popular ships in the franchise and baited and referenced often in the Deadpool comics and occasionally by the actors of the movies (I go down with this ship).

The BatB Chapter 27 various reference examples and info:

Deadpool VS Pinkie Pie (Marvel VS My Little Pony) DEATH BATTLE!: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T5QzLD5koc

Part of Your World (From “The Little Mermaid”): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXKIJuO07eM

Timmy Burch South Park Archives: http://southpark.wikia.com/wiki/Timmy_Burch

Harley Quinn and The Joker example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YFEMY8afU

Teddy Ruxpin Halloween Special - Nostalgia Critic: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hki4ZL2Cu30
Hugga Bunch Review: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4xVzX1_IMM

Star vs The Forces of Evil - Dimensional Scissors: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqH3P33Iup4

Squidward Example: https://youtu.be/_Y9hUsCTN9Y

Spideypool Example:
https://i.pinimg.com/originals/0a/7e/8e/0a7e8e70bd158bebe71898a1a4806fe0.jpg
Harry was fortunate in that in the when he popped out of the Gateway and finally returned to his own world, it wasn’t in any place that was truly dangerous or awkward for once.

But it was very, very cold.

Harry shivered as he frantically dug out his winter gear from his pack, and when he was relativity protected from the harsh cold wind whistling right through him like a frigid blade, he finally really took in his surroundings.

He was surrounded in jutting rolling rock with the thinnest of soil, frozen into a brittle blanket of permafrost grasping Igneous stone of pale tans, pinks, russets, tans, greys even a few gleams of blue here and there. The treeline was relatively sparse, and did nothing to cut down on the wind, which explained why he was so cold. There wasn't much in the way of shelter in this barren landscape, and judging by the climate, wherever he was, must be fairly Northerly.

The upside to his new predicament at least was he needn't be to worried about food and drink. Now that he was back, his magic hummed reassuringly under his skin, and he had his magical Peach Pitts and a magical cup that could give him all the hot chocolate and healing food he could consume.

He eyed the inhospitable ground, frost crackling under his boots. He wondered if Xi Wangmu would necessarily approve of him dropping a pitt in such a harsh climate? Then again, she had said it could grow pretty much anywhere, and he had seen his trees growing in the middle of city streets.

Shrugging, and trusting in the tree's own proclaimed durability, he reached into his neck pouch and tossed a pitt onto the ground a bit of a distance from him.

Sure enough, after only a few minutes a healthy looking glowing magical peach tree, with roots some how magically lodged deep into the thick bedrock, stood out like a supernatural sore thumb in the vast empty tundra.

Harry quickly harvested as many of the peaches as he thought he would need, pulled out his magic cup, called himself a few helpings of the sweet rich liquid, moaning when the warmth slid down his throat, and warmed him from his belly to his toes.

Gods Harry loved Magic! and best of all, he loved being home where he could do magic!

He interspersed his drink with bites of a peach and felt instantly better and rejuvenated.

When he was done, he put away his supplies, hitched his pack securely, and took to the air, picking a random destination and continued his journey into the literal unknown at this point.

ooo ooo ooo

A few days into his travel he had come up with a theory as to his location.
He had spotted a heard of Carabou lazily stripping bark from the base of trees in a sparse treeline as he flew overhead, and he was relatively sure, and given his surroundings, that he was likely in one of the Northern Provinces, the very Northern provinces, of Canada (at least according to the book he had pulled out of his pack on the animals).

Harry’s hopes to find some sort of clump of human civilization though had yet to bore fruit. In fact, the further he flew, the colder he became, and the more lost he felt. He soon found himself in a vast jagged mountain range that had a great thick gorge running down the middle interspersed with rivers, water falls and small lakes. Vegetation was even more sparse here, and the winds soon began to to be hazardous in navigating, forcing him to fly lower and closer to the rock faces to avoid being torn to shreds.

When Harry woke up in a shallow rock lee the next morning, it was to the first flakes of puffy white snow, and Harry realized with dismay that it must be further into the winter season then he had thought. He just hoped that he found a better place to shelter before the bad weather really hit.

Of course, only an hour into picking his way through the gorge, the world was swallowed up in white.

The harsh blizzard that had slammed into him had forced him to land and take the rest of the way on foot, looking for shelter. The Entire area looked to unstable, to exposed, and the wind to strong for his enlarged bird house he used for harsh weather. Though to be honest, he tended to avoid being this far North for reasons specifically such as this, and had never really had to prepare for such conditions as a blizzard in the Canadian Arctic before.

He managed to create a bubble, despite his exhaustion and numb extremities, and groaned when his head pounded and his ears rang in the sudden buffer against the elements. Harry pulled out an old oil lamp, sent a small spark of flame from his fingers inside, pulled out his staff, and began carefully making his way forward to look for a place to shelter and wait out the storm.

The bubble may be protecting him from the worst of the storm but it didn't help his visibility any. He prodded his staff into the ground before him as he walked and was able to avoid a few pitfalls and sink holes hidden by the snow.

At one point in his wandering, Harry thought that he'd seen a figure up a head in the blurry white.

It moved towards him swiftly, and as it came closer and closer, it gave off an odd guttural high pitched cackling sound that raised the hair on the back of his neck.

"MAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!"

Harry let out a hollar when something smashed into his shield, for a moment bringing a figure of a tall emaciated human-like body with ice blue skin, that looked putrid and badly frostbitten, long, brittle and frozen stiff hair, empty crazed eyes that were white without irises. Long, sharp fingernails scrambled against the shield, which held fast (1).

Harry raised his staff protectively and called fire to him, directing it from his fingers and outwards through the shield where the creature was plastered against while at the same time muttering the first exorcist chant he could think of.

The double duty attack seemed to do the trick, as the...whatever it was, flung itself backwards, its rags and hair set aflame as he ran off, screeching.

For the next few tense hours, Harry occasionally saw a few figure-like shadows in the snow, but
whether they were more of those creatures or simply a trick of the snow, Harry was left unbothered.

ooo ooo ooo

Eventually Harry did find a place to shelter, but certainly not what he had been expecting when the edge of his bubble suddenly met a solid surface and he found himself suddenly blinking dumbly at the side of a man-made worn stone wall in front of his nose.

Letting out a cry of relief, he circled the modest sized sturdy building until he found a set of thick looking oak doors painted a dark weathered grey.

Harry cancelled his Bubble, gasping as he took in a face full of snow carried on frigid screaming winds, his face going instantly numb, before he scrambled for the latch, to desperate by this point to be cautious. He strained against the immense weight, and the force of the wind, until he managed to successfully worm himself through a large enough gap.

The door closed behind him with a resounding slam and a tinkle above his head where a cast iron bell dangled merrily above, announcing his presence.

Harry took in his surroundings wearily.

He appeared to be in an old worn tavern of some sort. There was a large roaring fireplace in the middle of the room, a staggered mattering of small tables and mismatched chairs, all looking that they had come from other sets in better times, worn, chipped, scratched and broken.

The bar itself gleamed in the low light of a large central roaring fire, unusual as it appeared to be all one large carving out of Tiger's eye, the colors of the agate gleaming in shifting bands of browns, golds, and amber. (2)

The bar would have looked out of place if it weren't for the tiger's eye paneled floor, and what looked like various people, some in what looked like Halloween costumes, in pictures covering every inch of the wooden walls, framed in the same material.

There was a smattering of other people who turned to look at the latest newcomer. One was a rather decrepit looking fellow with stringy ash blond hair and close set brown eyes in a cape and hood, nursing a drink that had something that looked suspiciously like a rat's tail sticking out the side. He was muttering to himself as he bent diligently over a crossword puzzle after giving Harry only a brief look of disinterest.

There were two elderly people in the back covered head to tow in grey fur arguing heatedly over who got the last shot of vodka before switching over the merits of shipping SnowQueen over SwanQueen whatever that was. (3).

It was the blue scaled Fishman chatting up a skinny brown haired woman with 6 sets of eyes over a large bowl of boiled eggs and large mugs of steaming mead, the former pleading "Please Asibikaashi, you have to see that I am being sincere! I swear I'm good for it!," the woman sneered, "right! like I haven't heard that a million times before!" that lead Harry to realize that he was definitely not in a place catering to your average Normal. (4)

It was definitely larger on the inside then it had seemed on the outside, and the giant razor toothed scull of some nameless animal, its jaws open and framing what appeared to be the swinging door into the back kitchen, were certainly intimidating, and the place was relativity sparse of customers. Though given the location and weather that perhaps was the least surprising of the whole scenario.

Then from down the stairs the largest (out of those who looked relativity human looking) man that
Harry had seen yet came tromping merrily with a laidback gait.

He was large and hairy with silvered wirey hair that was pulled back messily in a high ponytail displaying a long oval face of oddly ageless dark bronze laugh lines and crows feet over a hairless face. The man, as he spotted Harry and approached, was easily a towering 7-8 foot tall, broad shouldered and for all that his face was smooth, his bulky arms sticking out of his rolled up sleeves of his red plaid shirt were exceedingly hairy and bulky.

"Well, Well! A new face! and in these parts no less! and s youngn' to!" the man boomed and held held out his hand, which harry took hesitantly, surprised that his hand wasn't crushed in the enthusiastic but surprisingly gentle shovel handed grip.

"Urm..." Harry muttered intelligently.

The man let out a bone rattling guffaw as he, carefully, slapped Harry on the back and lead the shivering boy to the fire, "Goodness lad! No need to look like I'm going to eat you! No worries, no worries now, take a load off by the fire and I'll bring you a hot drink to warm your insides!"

Soon Harry was sitting in a comfortable roughly hewn wooden chair near the fire with his bag by his feet, a blanket around his shoulders, and a mug of something warm and sweet wit ha slight spicy edge that made it hard to identify, even with his developed palette, but warmed him from head to toe and relaxed muscles he hadn't realized were tense until then.

"Now then youngn'," the man cheerfully spoke, sitting in a chair beside Harry's, "the name's Paul Bunyon, and before you get excited, I'm the seventh Paul," the man chuckled again, then leaned forward and down slightly, "Now then, who might you be little stranger, and how did someone your age end up all the way out here, and what are you after?" (5)

Harry was so relaxed, comfortable and warm that for some reason he thought it perfectly reasonable to speak frankly to this nice giant man that had invited him inside.

"I'm Harry, I arrived by accident from a place of dreams where a talking pink pony lead me to a doorway back, only instead of being where I was, I ended up all the way here. I was wandering around in the blizzard looking for shelter when I found this place by chance. I'm not after anything except a place to stay for a bit."

"Och," the man nodded sagely, "I suppose you wouldn't be the first unfortunate soul to wind up here by some magical accident. Most folk don't tend to mind where they step, is my experience."

Harry shrugged, taking another sip of he amazing drink, and found himself relaxing further...and nearly into the fire as his eyes drooped closed.

"Whoops!" Paul exclaimed, and quickly caught the scruff of the softly snoring boy's jacket, "perhaps overdid it with the drink. Well, off to bed with you then!"

Paul swooped the boy and his bag up easily into the cradle of one beefy arm and carried his new guest up stairs and settled the sleeping boy into one of the small, but warm, rooms for rent. He removed the boy's boots and gear, tucking him in under a mound of quilts and left him to sleep through the rest of the blizzard, muttering a soft "Welcome to Stopover."

Chapter End Notes
1. The creature that attacks Harry in the blizzard is called a Mahaha, its from the myths of the indigenous peoples of Northern Canada.

2. Tiger's Eye in its meaning is usually tied to the element of fire, it is used for the metaphysical properties sometimes for protection, resolving problems/mental clarity, releasing tension, and is a harmonizer.

3. SnowQueen is the Ship name between Regina Mills and Snow White and SwanQueen is the ship of Emma Swan and Regina Mills in the TV Show Once Upon A Time fandom.

4. The Fishman is your standard generic Black Lagoon/Shape of Water fair and Asibikaashi is a Spider Woman from the Ojibwe people (Chippewa) of southern Canada and northern US mythos that is a helper of the people, and inspiring female family members to weave protective charms in the shape of spider webs.

5. Paul Bunyon, the tavern owner's ancestor, is a giant lumberjack in American folklore that is accompanied by a giant blue ox, Babe, often performing super human feats of labor.

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