

THE SECRET CHILD

The Secret Child

TOP SECRET

Senior Staff only

By order of F Fraderghast

Chief Historian, Bairnsley University

This historical document of Jonathan and Mr Goodfellow senior is of a private and confidential nature. If you are reading it without permission, I will track you down and make you do a week's laundry for the entire university. More than that, your memory of the preceding year will be wiped, and yes, if you sat an exam, you will be repeating it. Imagine all that work going up in soap-bubbles.

Jonathan

NAME: Jonathan

CLASS: None.

SPECIALTY: Getting into trouble.

RÉSUMÉ: At ten, Jonathan is still young for his age and although he is showing an aptitude for magic, he's showing an equal aptitude for failing to realise his magical ability. It is a special skill that is driving his father, the renowned wizard Capro Goodfellow Senior, a little crazy.

PASSED: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Swordsmanship. He has shown some skill at potions, including *Granny's Special Cure All* and *Sleepy Night-Night Powder*.

Jonathan fidgeted. Trumpets and cheers echoed up and down the street outside.

“Focus!” Mr Goodfellow Senior thundered, his voice echoing through the tiny attic. “Son, I’m selling you into slavery in an hour’s time, and if you’re going to get out again safely, you have to focus.”

“I don’t want to sit around here. Not today,” Jonathan moaned. “Can’t you hear? Everyone’s out celebrating.” He peeked out the window. Was that the King’s carriage in the distance?

“This is not a game,” his father harrumphed. “It’s life and death. Potsie, High Wizard in charge of prophecies, and new leader of the wizards UN D’Ground, was adamant, tonight is the last night to save his prophesied *Secret Child*...all the children. And you’re not ready.”

“It’s easy. I blow the snooze powder, they go to sleep, and then I pick the lock, and ta dah! We’re all out, and the children live happily ever after.”

“Hmmp,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said again. “You need to remember how to keep track of time, so you know when to move.”

“But I want to move now. I’m missing out on the fun. There will be jugglers and all sorts of entertainers. Last time sweets were thrown into the crowd. Dad, are you sure we can’t go?”

“I don’t see why there’s all this fuss over a royal child that doesn’t even exist.”

“My friend Nealz says the soothsayers have predicted one. They said Queen Tishke’s child would grow up to rule Avondale and fight dragons.”

“Hah,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said. “Knowing the charlatans the King surrounds himself with, that’s highly unlikely.”

Cheers of, “Avondale! Avondale!” echoed around the tiny attic.

“Are you sure I can’t go see the parade? Just for a moment. I promise I’ll be ready in time to free the slaves.”

“Dammit, boy, focus. This is the first time you’ll be on the inside by yourself. It’s dangerous. And it’s not as easy as I make it look,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said. “Now, you’ve mastered the snooze powder and picking locks, but you should also be able to throw an illusion. Just in case.”

Jonathan shrugged. “Illusions and wizardry are no good to eat. That’s what Nealz says. I’m good at the real stuff, like potions. And lock picking.”

“It’s *all* real,” Capro said, rolling his eyes.

Jonathan shook his head. "Nealz says magic's just a trick."

"Good. Then learn the trick," Mr Goodfellow Senior thundered. "Or I won't let you go on this mission."

Jonathan sighed. "Yes, you will. We're trying to save children from child-slavers, and you can't get inside the pens, because you're not a child."

§

Jonathan wrapped his fingers around the steel bars. The sparse, dirty straw on the floor was neither warm, nor comfortable, only scratchy. This wasn't the fun adventure he thought it would be. Already, he was cold and tired. And hungry. He'd given his food to the others, who'd jumped on it like starving dogs. His stomach hurt. He wasn't sure if it was nerves or hunger or the magic antidote he'd taken to combat the sleeping powder his father had given him.

Half a dozen heavy-set thugs wearing a mix of leather and chainmail sat at a rough-sawn desk playing dice under a smoky oil lamp hanging from a hook on the ceiling. They carried whips and swords and scowled at each other just as much as they scowled at the children.

The little boy next to Jonathan was sobbing, trying to reach through the bars to his mother. Heavily pregnant, she was in a separate cage from the children.

"Shut the hells up," one of the guards yelled. "Before I beat you senseless."

The mother tried unsuccessfully to shush the boy.

"You'll be alright." Jonathan said, trying to comfort the mite. Some of the other children had piled together, trying to sleep, but it was like they didn't trust Jonathan and this boy. "Hey, what's your name?"

"Bounty," he snuffled. "'Cos I'm going to be rich. On account of my ma said never be poor," the kid whispered. "If you're rich, you can do what you like. And you never have to sell your family into slavery."

"Yup," Jonathan said. "When I grow up I'm going to have a mansion and live happily ever after. I just need to make my fortune first." He was sick of being laughed at for wearing clothes that had been fashionable a hundred years ago when his father had been a kid. And this getting sold into slavery was even less fun.

As the night wore on, the temperature plummeted and the kid snuggled up to Jonathan. If he was going to organise the escape, he'd have to move, but not yet, it was too cold. He tried to remember how he was supposed to keep track of time. Why hadn't he listened?

The advice rattled around in Jonathan's head. *When you're sure it's the dead of night, blow a pinch of Sleepy Night-Night Powder at each guard and wait one minute. By then, it should be safe to release the prisoners.*

Was it the dead of night yet?

Almost all the guards were gone. Just one was left inside...

Only when he saw the first glimmer of dawn, did Jonathan realise he'd waited too long.

There was no sound of conflict outside. His father, and his wizard friends should be there by now, shouldn't they?

Carefully, so as not to disturb the child, Jonathan disentangled his little arm. The boy whimpered and settled back to sleep.

The guard flicked a glare in their direction.

Jonathan waited until the guard was looking at someone else before blowing the powder in his direction.

Time passed. Jonathan counted the seconds. It seemed like forever.

...fifty-eight...fifty-nine...sixty. Why wasn't the guard sleeping?

At last, the man leaned back, snoring softly.

Jonathan fumbled with the lock, his hands felt clumsy. His throat tightened. This wasn't working, what did his father say? "Sesa moffne," he whispered and wiggled the pick again. This time it clicked open.

The sound echoed.

He gulped, terrified for an instant before he realised he hadn't even woken the sleeping children. He pushed the cage door timidly—it creaked. The guard still didn't move, so Jonathan pushed the heavy cage door the rest of the way open.

Little heads rose. They jostled their sleeping neighbours awake and looked at him with big round eyes.

With a finger to his lips, and a wave of his arm, Jonathan encouraged them to sneak out.

They hovered close as he unlocked the last cage.

"What are you doing?" a little girl whispered, brushing a dirty tangle of curls off her face.

"Shhh, we're escaping," Jonathan said. "Just one more." He unpicked the lock on the door with the pregnant woman. She rushed out to hug her boy, tears in her eyes. "Come on then Bounty. Bounty's mum. Everyone. Let's get out of here."

He pushed the heavy outside door open. And then quickly closed it again.
Four slavers were sprinting toward them.

§

From behind his vantage of a huge oak tree, Mr Goodfellow Senior stared at the huge, bald giant-like creatures approaching. Thurgles. Seven of them. Over seven foot high, and almost as wide, they were formidable foes who believed that power made even their most evil deeds right. Worse, magic was completely ineffective on thurgles—and from the way those shadows at their feet were moving, it looked like they'd brought hell hounds.

Potsie, you said we needed to rescue them tonight, and you were right. But where are you?

Mr Goodfellow Senior needed a fighter. Or wizards who could hold their own in a magic-free fight. But they hadn't turned up.

What was going on? They'd planned this. Rescue the young wizard boy with as little trauma as possible. Jonathan's job was to pave the way, and stop the children from freaking out when the wizards arrived. All he and his fellow wizards should have had to do was subdue the external guards and maybe encourage them to try a new profession.

For an instant Mr Goodfellow Senior wished the thurgles were giants. Giants were more reasonable. They generally wanted one thing, and it was to be left alone.

His son would make his move soon from inside the rough-hewn cabin where the slaves were kept—if he hadn't already.

Should I rush in and destroy my very carefully-laid plans. Or stay behind this tree and wait for Potsie's UN D'Ground?

He was about to rush in, when the fusty old Chancellor of Bairnsley University appeared. "I say," he said. "What are you doing here? This isn't a board-approved action."

Damnably busy body, always poking his nose in where it wasn't wanted.

Mr Goodfellow Senior wanted to scream that there was no time for his nonsense. He clenched his fists. "Where's Potsie?"

"I ordered him and his stupid UN D'Ground group to stay back," the chancellor huffed. "You are supposed to be on sabbatical, not embroiling Bairnsley University in your anti-slaving vendetta."

“Get them here, now!” Mr Goodfellow Senior yelled. “Or, by the seven gods, I’ll turn you into a newt.”

“Stop your fussing. Who cares what happens to a few humans?”

“I do,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said. “And you should, too. Besides, if Potsie’s right there’s a wizard boy in there.” Two, if you counted Jonathan, but Mr Goodfellow Senior wasn’t keen on his son going to that stuffy old school yet. Jonathon needed to live a little first.

The fusty old wizard eyed him up and down, like there weren’t better things to be doing. “What aren’t you telling me?” he demanded.

“Old Potsie also said something about a famous warrior. And dire consequences if these slaves weren’t rescued tonight.”

“That Potsie,” the Chancellor said, and promptly disappeared.

He’d better be getting help, Mr Goodfellow Senior thought.

Time had passed. Precious seconds. The thurgles were close now. Mr Goodfellow Senior could see their hellhounds clearly. A dozen of them, in all shades of grey from inky black to silver-white. If the thurgles let these creatures go, while half-starved children were being released, it would be carnage.

What were the thurgles here for?

Were they here for the slaves?

Were they here for the slave traders?

Or was it a coincidence? Were the thurgles just out hunting and determined not to come home empty-handed?

Five heavy-set thugs wearing a mix of leather and chainmail exited the cabin.

The fool slavers set up a meeting, Mr Goodfellow Senior thought. Those thurgles will never keep an agreement made with a handful of men. They’d take both the slaves and the slavers and not think anything of a broken agreement.

Mr Goodfellow Senior felt as if he were on the edge of a knife. Move too early and it would be slaughter, move too late and he’d never free the slaves.

When the slavers were within twenty paces, the thurgles grinned and hefted their weapons. “We challenge you for your goods. Winner take all.”

“What?”

“No!”

“We had a deal.”

The thurgles roared with laughter and attacked.

Suddenly the slavers realised their error. They were running, running back to the camp with hell hounds snapping at their heels.

Mr Goodfellow Senior raced too. He had to stop the hounds. He threw illusions, decoy humans for the hell-hounds to chase. That only confused the creatures for a moment.

In seconds the first slaver fell to the hounds. The other four kept on running. Screaming erupted inside the slaver's cabin.

This should've been easy. An inside man, putting the slavers to sleep and helping the slaves escape into the waiting arms of Potsie's UN D'Ground wizards.

§

Jonathan tried not to panic. The wizards would be here to help soon. "Quick. Help me!" But the children ran and hid. Some of them screamed. Only the little boy, Bounty tried to help, but even together, they couldn't keep the door shut.

If only I could lock it.

The slavers burst through the door. Pulling out whips they lashed the children indiscriminately.

A whip raked the sleeping guard's face and he startled awake, dozily looking around. "Get back in your cages!" the guard yelled, red faced and furious. He grabbed his own whip and laid about, nastier and meaner than the others. His whip drawing blood.

"Bit late to wake up now, Bazz!" one of them yelled, striking Bazz with his whip again.

"We don't have time for this, Slimy," the biggest one said. "We need to grab as many as we can and get out of here! Thurgles are coming!"

Screaming echoed as children dodged the slavers, desperately trying to get as far away as possible.

"This way, quick!" Slimy yelled, taking to the wall with an axe.

Jonathan hesitated. It was chaos, and none of it made any sense.

Surely thurgles couldn't be coming.

But if they weren't why were the slavers trying to escape?

The only explanation was that his father must be here, throwing his illusions.

What a stupid plan.

Then Jonathan saw the boy and his mother were amongst the prisoners being dragged away. He rushed over as the mother collapsed on the ground, Bounty clutching her arm. "Mother!" he cried, clutching her skirt.

Jonathan tried to help drag her away from the brute.

A whip slashed Jonathan's back. He gritted his teeth against the pain, and kept on tugging.

Rough hands grabbed his arm and squeezed tight. "Thanks for volunteering. You can come. And the other kid." The slaver smirked. "It's got to be better than waiting for thurgles to kill you."

"Idiot," Jonathan spat. "Thurgles don't come to Avondale. You'll believe in demons next. Hells, you practically are demons."

The man laughed as he kicked and hit at slow-moving children to get them moving.

This was not how it was meant to go.

§

This is not how it was meant to go, Mr Goodfellow Senior thought as terrified screaming rang out from inside the slavers' cabin. Any minute now the thurgles would bash the door down and the real mayhem would start.

He had to think of something before that happened, but all he had was his wizard skills. Next time he went out adventuring he'd be sure to bring a swordsman.

If I break in around the side, at least some of them will be able to get out.

Mr Goodfellow Senior sprinted as fast as he could, but before he could blast a hole in the wall, a demon burst through the roof. No not a demon, but a phantasm of some power. It crackled with magical energy and burst into flame.

"By the Seven," Mr Goodfellow Senior roared. "There is a powerful wizard in there." He held out a hand—and was surrounded by slaverling hellhounds.

§

Jonathan, still caught in the slaver's grip, stopped struggling and stared at the red-skinned demon rising above them. Humanoid, with a bull-like head and sharp menacing horns. His worst fears had sprung to life.

Don't panic. It's probably not real, or we'd be dead already.

The slaver dropped Jonathan and Bounty and ran toward where the other slavers were trying to bash through the sturdy wall.

The wood cracked.

Why weren't they trying to go out through the door?

Outside, Jonathan thought he heard the howling and yelping of wolves. Something very heavy smashed against the door.

So that's why. Could it really be thurgles? Or is it wizards? Am I brave enough to look?

Bounty, shoulders shaking, pulled at Jonathan. "I made a demon," he said. "And it scared away the bad men."

"You're very clever," Jonathan said, even if the kid was far too young to be throwing illusions that crackled with fire.

It had to be the wizards. Jonathan ran to the door, expecting to be saved, when the door smashed into splinters. A wolf leapt through.

No, a hell hound. Two hell hounds. Three.

Gods, what had Jonathan learned about hell hounds? They were almost wolves, but not quite. Fire was their element, so the fire and smoke from the demon would not scare them. Nor would the smoking fires in the straw, or the flaming brand Bounty's mother was constructing from a chair-leg and straw.

Jonathan had nothing but his lock pick and the extra sleep powder. Hands shaking, he scrambled to find his hidden pocket. In his hurry, he tore the fabric. The Sleepy Night-Night Powder tumbled everywhere. All twenty doses. But at least he caught the *Granny's Cure All* vial before it dropped to the ground.

All around him people stopped running around and crumpled onto the floorboards, fast asleep. The demon overhead dispersed as the boy's eyes closed.

Why am I still awake? Jonathan wondered. *That's right, the antidote.*

The hell hounds raced in and pounced on a tiny girl, sinking its teeth into her arm. She screamed and woke as the hell hound picked her up in its jaws.

Jonathan leapt toward the beast and shook the pocket fabric at the hell hound.

It fell asleep, releasing the poor child, who rushed over to a pile of children, before falling asleep on top of them.

The hell hounds rushed around their fallen companion, nudging and licking the beast. They fell asleep too.

The smoky fires were no longer confined to patches of floor. Flames licked up a table leg.

So many people to save! Jonathan raced around and tried to wake them, dragging kids from the spreading flames. They'd open their eyes, stumble a few steps

and fall asleep again. The flames and smoke seemed to be making the Sleepy Night-Night Powder worse.

Thurgles burst in through the door. Real thurgles, not illusions, and they did not fall asleep.

Of course they didn't. Thurgles were immune to magic.

"Hurry," a huge thurgle yelled. "Secure the prisoners. This place is going to burn." Using manacles and ropes to secure everyone, the thurgles worked as a team to slow the flames and drag the slavers and Bounty's pregnant mother to safety, before coming back for the kids.

Jonathan did everything he could to drag the kids away from the worst of the blaze. Eyes watering, lungs burning, he collapsed in a fit of coughing as the crackle of the flames got louder. A manacle was secured to his wrist and he was dragged into the morning light knowing there were still children left in there. Dimly, he thought he saw his father slink away, and he knew in his heart that magic was for cowards.

§

Mr Goodfellow Senior wanted to rush in and hold his boy in his arms. But that would be stupid. There were more Thurgles than him, and all of them were needed to slow the flames and drag the rest of the children to safety.

"A good day," one of the thurgles said, checking the chains on all the prisoners were secure, especially those of the brawny slavers.

"Yes. Good workers!" the biggest one grinned. "Lots of money. And you thought we would only get the little ones." Mr Goodfellow Senior almost choked. The thurgles were talking like the slavers had been the real target here, not children at all. Which meant old Potsie was right. If the thurgles didn't see them as valuable they could be all be killed.

I can still rescue them all. I just need a plan.

But Mr Goodfellow Senior couldn't think of a plan—except to run back to the University to see what was taking Potsie and his D'Grounders so long. When he got to Bairnsley, he found them all arguing. Somehow the Chancellor had taken Potsie's prophecy about a secret child and concluded it was Jonathan. Which was ridiculous. Yes, Jonathan's identity had been kept from Bairnsley University administration official documents, but he was hardly *The Secret Child*. Probably.

“Shut up,” Mr Goodfellow Senior shouted at the pompous fool of a Chancellor.
“We can argue later. Did you not see the thurgles earlier?”

As one the wizards turned. “Thurgles?”

“Yes. Grab every real weapon you have and run,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said.
“If we wait any longer we might not have any children to worry about.” Mr
Goodfellow Senior took his own advice and ran, Potsie and some of the other
members of the UnD’Ground following closely on his heels.

§

Jonathan woke face down on long grass. From the angle of the sun it was late
morning. The slavers hut, not so far away, was little but blackened coal and
smoulder.

A woman was screaming. Bounty’s mother. The terrified woman was giving
birth now! The shock must have brought it on early. Jonathan slipped the manacles
off his wrists and sidled over, winding a chain loosely around his hand just in case a
thurgle looked his way. Surreptitiously, he held the woman’s hand. She stopped
screaming and whispered, “Bounty, my son, the trick is to stay rich. They can’t get
you if you have money.”

“Yes,” Jonathan said, glancing over at Bounty sleeping peacefully nearby.

The thurgles ignored them, not seeming to care that they were the only two
awake. Jonathan didn’t know what else to do, so he held her hand, letting her crush
his fingers in hers as she breathed in ragged gasps and bit down on her hand to stop
from screaming.

When the baby came, it didn’t cry. He held the little bloody bundle unmoving
in his arms.

Granny’s Cure All.

He had it somewhere. He found the tiny vial in an intact pocket and rubbed
the baby’s back and chest with it until it cried, fists bunched and screaming at the
world. Carefully, he placed the squirming baby on its mother’s chest.

The woman, pale and spent, smiled and slumped in Jonathan’s arms. “Make
yourself as rich as a king, boy,” she said. “Magic won’t feed you. There’s no such
thing.”

“I will,” Jonathan said.

She took a long harrowing breath—then nothing.

Jonathan tried rubbing the rest of the Cure All on her skin, but there was very little left and she did not breathe again—no matter how much he cradled her head and begged her not to die.

Tears in his eyes, Jonathan swaddled her child in his shirt so it wouldn't get cold.

"Waste of time," one of the thurgles said.

"Might make a tasty roast," another muttered. "My brother said roast baby was a fine delicacy." They leered and started walking toward him.

Would they really eat the baby?

Jonathan had wanted to unlock the other children, but he couldn't risk it. Instead he threw his lock pick at Bounty, yelled "Sesa moffne" and cradling the baby close, ran.

"Stop!" a thurgle cried.

Fat chance thought Jonathan, hoping there were more slaves escaping behind him. He ran through the long grass, disturbing fat, lazy bees.

In moments, the hell hounds were snapping at his feet, threatening to bring him down. He had to stop. The baby might not survive a fall, and if it did, it wouldn't survive the hell hounds.

He held the baby up out of their reach. "Get those hell hounds back, or I'll kill them," he lied, hoping the tactic would buy him time to think of something else.

"Hold!" A thurgle yelled, while his friends fell about laughing. Jonathan couldn't see what was so funny. But his eyes lit up with hope, because, in the distance, a trail of dust approached.

Wizards? Surely they were too late. Already Bounty, and the kids the boy had managed to release, were being dragged back by the thurgles.

Suddenly, Mr Goodfellow Senior was right there, beside him.

"About time," Jonathan snapped at his father.

The wizards weren't throwing illusions, or any of the magic his father talked about. They'd brought bows and arrows and were firing them at the thurgles. A thurgle fell heavily to the ground, the others all ran. Their leader dragging a chain of prisoners away: The slavers.

"Let them go," a pompous wizard insisted when Mr Goodfellow Senior tried to get his fellow wizards to chase them. "I thought you did not like slavers."

“Fool,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said, but did not argue more than that. Within moments only the children and wizards remained.

“You saved that baby, you know,” his father said. “You should be proud.”

“Yes, you saved my brother,” the boy whispered. “But you killed my mother.”

Jonathan shook his head. “No. It wasn’t my fault. I did everything I could to try and save her.”

I did, didn’t I? Maybe if I’d had more cure all...

He tried to hug Bounty, but Bounty pushed him away. Then when the wizards tried to round the children, Bounty stamped his foot. “I’m not going anywhere,” he yelled. “Not with any of you.” Shaking, he conjured another demon image.

“Hey,” Jonathan said. “You’ll be alright.”

“Do you even know where are they taking us?”

“Most of the children have homes we can send them to, but you’re special. You’re going to Bairnsley to learn how to be a wizard,” a pompous wizard said. He waved his hand at Jonathon. “And so is this boy, who stinks of magic.”

“No. No, I’m not,” Jonathon snapped. “And don’t think you can keep me, I can escape from anywhere.”

Capro nodded, defiantly staring the pompous wizard in the eye. “He’s right. It was the first thing I taught him. You’ll just have to wait until he’s good and ready, because, mark my words, every child needs a childhood.”

“Fine, you deal with the baby then,” the pompous git said and stomped off.

§

Mr Goodfellow Senior watched his fellow wizards go. There was no way he was ever going to rely on them again. They were useless. And that included Potsie, and the UN D’Ground which he’d had so much hope for.

And he still had one last problem—the baby with no mother.

Jonathan was rocking the wee mite even as it screamed blue murder. “This baby’s kind of adorable,” he said in spite of the racket.

“You did a great job of rescuing him, but a baby needs a mother,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said. “Babies needs to be fed properly and you don’t have the proper equipment.”

Jonathan laughed. “Good, I don’t want a baby.” Although he did like the way their fists grabbed everything nearby. “Only queens want babies. When my friends’ mothers have babies they cry. A lot.”

“That’s only because they worry about how to feed them. Queens don’t have to worry about things like that. They just have to worry about getting a baby in the first place.” Which gave Mr Goodfellow Senior an idea. “Jonathan, what did the soothsayers say about the Queen’s baby?”

“That it was going to fight dragons and rule two kingdoms.”

Mr Goodfellow Senior looked at the babe. It was definitely a fighter. One day it might even fight dragons. And of all the children he’d seen today, this one had the air of a famous warrior about it—it was sure yelling angrily enough. He tried to disentangle his beard from the babe’s determined little fist.

Together, Jonathan and Mr Goodfellow Senior snuck into the castle and offered the Queen the little bundle.

“Yes,” she said. “My goodness, yes. But it must be a secret, even from me.”

So Capro lay illusions all around to ensure not too many questions were asked and hours later, the birth of a baby boy, Sylvan, was announced with great fanfare.

Days passed, and everything seemed to be going exactly as planned when the castle rather sheepishly announced Tishke’s new baby was in fact a girl.

“Oh dear, I think I might have laid those spells around the castle a bit more strongly than I’d intended,” Mr Goodfellow Senior said to Jonathan. “I just didn’t realise the baby was a girl. Did you know? You must have known.”

Jonathan smiled. “That’s highly sensitive information. Top secret. Now let’s go out and celebrate properly.”

“Fair enough,” his old man said. And they went out onto the street with the rest of Avondale to celebrate their secret, out in public with a thousand other well-wishers cheering the royal couple, and their new baby, Sylvalla.

THE END

Turn the page for a sneak preview of **Quest...**

QUEST

A.J. PONDER

The Sylvalla Chronicles: Quest, Prophecy and Omens, are a vital part of Thomas Malory's secret collection. They were hidden deep inside the Whittington's Library in the Greyfriars Monastery, London. When fire swept through the Monastery in 1940, the collection was moved and hidden in an undisclosed location west of Wellington. It has been an epic journey to bring F Fraderghast's tales out of the shadowy realm of magic—and into the light.



Quest Preview



The Birthday Party

Light pushed its way through the shutters and fought a torrid, losing battle with the dust in the old wizard's attic. Outside was brilliant sunshine. Inside, the small beams barely illuminated Mr Goodfellow Senior and his son, Jonathan, on this, the old wizard's 150th birthday.

Mr Goodfellow Senior looked pretty good for his age. His hair had long since turned white, his wizard's cloak had seen better days, but piercing eyes flashed over his beak-like nose, and his old bones moved around the cluttered attic with the spryness of a much younger man. He chortled as he poured saltpetre and other dangerous chemicals into little cylinders.

Jonathan looked suspiciously at the half-filled squib in his hand. Making fireworks wasn't his idea of fun. It was not something ordinary people did, and Jonathan worked very hard at being ordinary. He also tried his best to be a dutiful son—he'd missed several excellent money-making opportunities to be here today—but did his father appreciate it? No. His father had begun one of his endless rants about magic ...

"The problem with any endeavour is that you must begin at the beginning, and sometimes the beginning isn't as exciting as the middle or the end. That is the way of things. It takes time to learn to read, it takes time to learn an instrument and it takes time to become—"

"A charlatan," Jonathan burst in, sick of the smell of sulphur and phosphorous, and tired of the expectation that would throw away a growing business to follow in his father's footsteps as a demented butcher with delusions of wizardry. Most of all, he was sick and tired of this one-sided conversation.

"How *dare* you!" Mr Goodfellow Senior roared. "*I* am a wizard of the—"

"By the seven gods, Capro!" Jonathan roared back, his fist thumping the table, scattering potions and flasks and little piles of powder. "There is no such thing as magic."

As if to deny his words, a firecracker rocketed upward, streaming pink and blue sparks before ricocheting off the ceiling and exploding in a shower of butterflies. Jonathan ducked for cover as they swirled around the room, their rainbow wings turning to ash wherever they landed.

Mr Goodfellow Senior glared, his eyes burning fiercely between strands of white hair, his mouth opening and shutting in pure outrage.

It took a while for Jonathan to realise it wasn't the blasphemy, his careless fist, or even the explosion that had made his old man so angry. Jonathan had uttered a forbidden word: *Capro*.

"Don't ever call me that again, young whippersnapper. Don't *ever* call me by my first name. It ain't right. I've told you and told you. But do I ever get your respect? No! All talent and no patience. Forget it. Just go. It's not like I haven't had enough birthdays. No need to make a big fuss over this one."

Jonathan attempted to straighten his tunic and wipe the soot from his face. "Um. Sorry."

"Why won't you just toe the line and take up the family business?" Mr Goodfellow Senior asked. "It's got a long and revered tradition. It's the stuff that—oh, frag it ..." The old man trailed off, his voice deliberately thin. "Nobody cares about magic anymore." Then, as he always did in times like this, he pulled out an old worn stone and caressed it. "I don't know why you fight so hard. Magic is power, son."

"No." Jonathan sighed. "For the last time, Father. I'm not wasting my life on this nonsense. I've got a career, a booming business. Contingency." He patted his gold-filled pocket. "All you've got is the clinging stench of old meat and a large tax bill chasing you."

"Keeps me fit, boy."

Jonathan raised an eyebrow. What he saw was a bag of skin and bones held together by wrinkles. Someone who couldn't make money out of his beloved career and had to resort to butchery to make ends meet.

The old wizard sighed. "Look, boy, you're thirty—almost an adult. It's about time you started living up to your potential."

"I've been an adult for sixteen years, I run my own business—"

"Grow up!"

"Hellfire and damnation, I am grown up. It's not my fault you're a hundred years out of date. There's no place for wizards in the modern world. Half the towns I go to would string me up at the first hint of magic. Anyway, I've got places to be and the miles don't get any shorter standing around here, playing with firecrackers."

"Ignorant fool! Don't come looking to me the next time you hit trouble." Mr Goodfellow Senior turned away, arms crossed.

Jonathan sighed. Again. Retrieved his battered hat and made for the door. He didn't know what to make of his old man's delusions. Being a wizard didn't make gold pieces—not when anybody could make *Granny's Special Cure All*.

Mr Goodfellow Senior almost retorted: that's what you think, boy, I know many ways to really eat up the miles, but you're not ready for them. You can only manage *Cure All*, and you don't even realise it's magic.

Unfortunately, nobody appreciates a mind reader, so Mr Goodfellow Senior bit his tongue and kept on biting it, as Jonathan grabbed his broad-brimmed trader's hat and slammed the door, swearing under his breath never to return ever, ever again.

As he watched his son disappear down the street, Mr Goodfellow Senior contemplated that it hadn't been much of a birthday. Jonathan was just too wayward. Always had been. Besides, the lad was right, the world had changed. The old wizard could smell it. The world had become a darker, more dangerous place for magic users, and Jonathan, for all his protestations, was a wizard. He couldn't hide it forever, not even from himself. Time was all he needed.

But there was no time. Trouble was coming, and Jonathan's untrained talent attracted danger to himself, and anyone near him, like giant moths to a candle.

Mr Goodfellow Senior poured himself a cup of tea, and as an afterthought, poured another for his absent son.

Jonathan didn't come back, and when the old wizard went to empty the cup, a fruit fly was struggling in the amber liquid.

It was not a good sign.

§

Mr Goodfellow Senior

NAME: Capro Goodfellow.

CLASS: Less.

FAMILIAR: With some of the less savoury additions that will help your steak and kidney pie go a little further.

SPECIALTY: Living. 150 years of it.

RÉSUMÉ: Has run several businesses in the meat line, all of which unaccountably went bust at the first hint of a tax collector. There's speculation that the old man is a wizard due to his making of fireworks and the loud noises that often emanate from his rooms. Of course, these are rumours designed to scare small

children and should not be taken seriously. After all, what true magician would stoop to selling *Granny's Special Cure All*?

As a child, Mr Goodfellow Senior's son, Jonathan, taunted a certain Dirk—a well-known and infamously temperamental swordsman—and disappeared shortly before his fifteenth birthday. Nobody was surprised.

Despite expectations to the contrary, Jonathan turned up a few years later having established a career in sales—in a very distant part of the country. He now travels the length and breadth of the realm, hawking everything from ointments to jewellery. From time to time, Mr Goodfellow Senior is asked by a desperate mother to intercede with the temperamental swordsman. The only advice he's ever given is: *tell them to run like Hades and never look back*.

PASSED: Unknown. Did they even have exams in his day?



Mr Goodfellow Senior rescued the fly and looked deep into the tea, searching for a vision just beneath the surface. He was about to give up in disgust when a flake of saltpetre drifted into the amber liquid.

The tea rippled.

Mr Goodfellow Senior gripped the table.

The dark liquid bubbled and steamed. A face coalesced from its seething depths and crested the surface. It had a hooked nose, lank black hair and storm-cloud eyes.

Startled, he rocked the table and the image shattered.

Pressing his wrinkled knuckles into his forehead, the old wizard took a deep breath and looked deeper ...

This time a girl's face swam into view. Not just any girl; a princess, about eight years old. Her frilly blue dress matched her eyes, and a diamond tiara perched on golden hair. Instantly, he realised she wasn't a typical princess. For a start, she was practising sword fighting with a small class of noble-born boys. Her dress was ripped in several places, and her diamond tiara threatened to slide off. Even so, her fierce determination put the boys to shame as she laid about them with her training stick.

A woman entered the room, ushering in half a dozen servants. The girl exploded with the fury of a wildcat, until, surrounded, she was dragged away kicking and screaming—her diamond tiara falling unnoticed to the floor.

The scene slid, time passed in the vision and the girl grew strong and wiry, her sword ever within grasp. Strange that the princess' parents had not yet stamped out the unruly and unbecoming behaviour—no doubt the royal couple were still reeling from the fact that they had created a *girl*, let alone a girl with such dangerous determination and a pointed dislike of sitting still.

The vision faded.

Mr Goodfellow Senior cautiously searched for the wizard he'd seen earlier, focusing his efforts on finding a younger, less dangerous version. A young boy's face wavered and swam into view, his bottom lip trembling, his eyes wide with either fear or anger as a man and woman, their mouths set in thin lines, thrust him into the iron grip of the Fairly University gatekeeper.

Across the muddy ruts of a deserted courtyard loomed a hideous brick monstrosity, half tumbled down and covered with weeds and creepers, and surrounded by iron bars.

Finding himself on the wrong side of those bars, the young wizard stared disconsolately at his new home. His bare feet oozed through the mud, before he climbed up to the doorstep and peered into the gloom.

Mr Goodfellow Senior wrinkled his nose in consternation and tried to ignore the smell of dampness and body odour, overlaid by the lingering and all-too-potent smell of overcooked cabbage. Behind its drab façade, the inside of the building was mustier and less attractive than the exterior suggested.

Yet this is where the young wizard lived for many years—studying the ancient texts while the other boys gambolled in the university gardens.

The boy started reading some of the simpler volumes written in the ancient tongue. Children's books, mostly. But there was one truly remarkable tome. A treasure, riddled with bookworms and delicate enough to crumble under careless fingers, it was older than anything Mr Goodfellow Senior had ever seen. Its uniform writing could only have been crafted by magic, and on its faded green cover it bore but a single word, *Biology*.

Mr Goodfellow Senior barely noticed the transformation as the brooding young man pored over the book with a feverish intensity, fascinated by the marvels flickering tantalisingly out of reach. Small changes of physique blurred over time, until suddenly the boy had grown into a man. Or more accurately, a wizard.

Time slowed. The young wizard stopped. His hand hovered in the air, his small eyes strained over his prominently crooked nose, his body poised as if on the verge of a great discovery.

Mr Goodfellow Senior leaned over, his nose almost in the cup. What was it the boy intended as he sat at his small table consulting a marked passage in the book with such burning fervour? He couldn't be planning to revive a beast of old—could he?

Recreating such dangerous magic was far beyond the rules of acceptable wizardry, but the temptation was overwhelming; Capro Goodfellow could feel it even through the vision. He could clearly see the words on the man's silent lips, and catch the glint of an eye, as the young wizard plucked a lizard from a fold in his robe.

"Sphenodontidae! Hatteria punctata."

The young wizard stopped, his lips closed, his chest expanded.

"Stop," Capro Goodfellow breathed, knowing there was nothing he could do.

The young wizard stretched his palm over the book. "Make—it—so," he said, clear as a bell. The lizard rippled and became—something else. Something wrong. It turned to stare at Mr Goodfellow Senior. No longer a harmless beast, its nearest black eye reflected a face it could not possibly see.

Capro Goodfellow startled, almost losing the vision. He clutched at the cup with both hands, more determined than ever to see what would happen next.

A flash of magical fire lit the surface of the tea. The suddenly-hot cup shattered in his burning hands, spraying scalding-hot tea all over the table.

Mr Goodfellow Senior stared at the mess in horror. There, scattered across the table, the tea leaves had formed the word:

Quest.

Mr Goodfellow Senior reeled back in horror.

A Quest?

He tried to put his fractured visions together in his mind: an evil wizard, a fighting princess. Maybe a questing princess? And somehow his boy, Jonathan, was mixed up with them. That was bad enough, but more than that, the magical fire worried Mr Goodfellow Senior. Traditionally, fire was the sign of dragons and power untamed.

A word came to his lips—and remained unspoken—***Asumgeld***. For one hundred and twenty-five years, Capro had tried never to think of her. For one hundred and twenty-five years, he'd avoided the fate of his fellow dragon-hunters.

Maybe the magical fire was from the wizard.

For a fleeting moment, Mr Goodfellow Senior felt relief—then he realised an evil wizard powerful enough to hurl sheets of magical fire would be as dangerous as a dragon. More dangerous. The sheer strength of that fire was frightening—it had passed through the theoretically impenetrable barrier of the vision and etched itself into little white blisters across his hands.

A vial of *Granny's Special Cure All* soon alleviated the pain, but the cause could not be dismissed so easily. Jonathan was about to be caught in the middle of great events like a fly in water.

Worse, there was only one way Mr Goodfellow Senior might protect his son. It was an extreme measure, but by the seven gods there was nobody who could stop him—not even Jonathan himself.

The Princess Sylvalla

The Princess Sylvalla

NAME: Sylvalla.

CLASS: Ruling.

FAMILIAR: Swift, her pony, might not precisely be a familiar, but he is Sylvalla's animal companion.

SPECIALTY: Escapism.

RÉSUMÉ: This princess would be renowned for her beauty, were it not for her unfashionably athletic figure, developed by pursuing aggressive masculine activities so unsuited to the fairer sex. She hails from a petty and insignificant kingdom, Avdale or something, not that it really matters. As expected in a princess, she has golden hair, blue eyes and is horribly spoilt. If she wasn't a princess, she would not have been able to prance around with a sword and have her own way for so long.

PASSED: Killing, Sword Fighting, Hand-to-Hand Combat & Archery. Under protest, she also managed to scrape through: Diplomacy, Deportment, Reading, Writing & Arithmetic. (Arithmetic being a fancy word for a subject that is little more than the addition and subtraction and multiplication needed to keep a

household's accounts in order, and shouldn't be confused with the more advanced concepts of arithmetic and mathematics.)



Sylvalla stared moodily at the rain falling outside her window. She hated every drop gliding down the opalescent glass with a quiet intensity. So much so, that nobody, not even her old nurse, could bear to be in the same room.

Banned from the practice room for a fortnight—again. Worst of all, it had been for such a trivial offence. Wearing a sword to a banquet. Sylvalla couldn't see what all the fuss was about. The men were allowed to wear swords whenever they liked. Why shouldn't she also carry her sword all the time?

Sylvalla blamed her mother. About a month ago, the queen had taken to dishing out punishments for the slightest thing. It was a worrying sign. Instead of being her usual easy-going self—she had become far too interested in what her daughter was up to, and worse still, in making sure that whatever Sylvalla was up to was stopped immediately.

It rained for the entire first week of her imprisonment, so all Sylvalla could do was invent invectives with which to curse the torrent. She wouldn't mind so much, but horses (Sylvalla thought of her pony as a horse) tend to have poor footing in boggy ground. She couldn't risk it. Not after last time. Swift had suffered terribly as a team of horse-grooms dragged her pony out of the mire with slings and ropes. Sylvalla's pride had also suffered. Everybody who wasn't pulling had gathered around to watch the muddy princess and laugh their heads off.

"Not again. Never again," Sylvalla vowed for perhaps the hundredth time that day. Seething, she wondered what she should do now that her life was so unbearable.

In contrast, Sylvalla's parents had been unusually happy. The queen chinked her glass against the king's. "To a disciplined daughter," she said.

"To an orderly household," sighed her father happily. Drinking his wine with infinite satisfaction because he truly believed they had finally devised a punishment with the appropriate effect. This was obviously not the case, and the academic debate still rages—was this an indication of a lack of intelligence? Or a reflection of a lack of imagination?

Either way, they were both discreetly mocked as fools by the rest of the court. (On pain of death, even courtiers can be discreet.) For everybody, *everybody*,

everybody knew (except apparently, her parents) that a bored Sylvalla utilised areas of her brain best left dormant.

The dignitaries, the staff, and even the stones themselves seemed to hold their breath with the knowledge that she would come up with something worse than fencing lessons. Or swords at table. Something big. Something that spelt TROUBLE in capital letters and then forgot the punctuation

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W HEN ALL THE HEROES ARE GONE,
SOMEONE WILL TAKE THEIR PLACE