On 15 June 2017 at 19:58, Mike McGraw <[mike.mcgraw@gmail.com](mailto:mike.mcgraw@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dangett Booknard gravitated to Bardlii Noonstar near immediately, despite the young man’s radiant aura of immense privilege, and confoundingly mystical finery.

The odd pair could often be found discussing magical theory at all hours - a brightly articulating Mana Architect-in-the-wings, excitedly waving tall, broad, and deep ideas at and over his elder, squat-and-smiling, grey-robed stone of a companion, by the rosy-blue candlelight of the 7th-level Cellibrary, where all the weirdest books - weird even for *wizards*, mind you - were kept (possibly in the hopes that one or two of them might decide to disappear on their own, in time\*).

*\* Some of those books in fact did leave on their own accord occasionally, which was not so surprising, given the kind of books that found their way there, which I just mentioned. The word Cellibrary had, unfortunately, been coined by someone when the College's cellars began to be used as libraries, as the College’s need to store aging ideas gradually overtook its need to stock food for the coming winters. The name stuck, since the convoluted cogs of the College’s 4th bureaucracy were so fully gridlocked by the time it came to the renaming of the middle-lower chambers, that most of the decisions were technically left to only 4 of the 17 acting Council members, three of whom were in full Twilight at that point, with the other rapidly on his way there.*

The two mismatched men infused that chamber with at least as much creative energy from their oddly-tempered debates as most of the beleaguered scholars who had written the pages surrounding them had ever managed to, when it was their lot and profession to do so. This was why the books, as a whole, tolerated the friends’ loud presence at otherwise intolerable hours. Individual opinions amongst the tomes did of course vary, but those are all other stories, tangential to this one.

Dangett - or “Dag-nett”, as roughly half of the people who knew him seemed to prefer – was an eighth-generation Book-Shelver at the College, hailing from a long line of respected Book-Shelvers. The surname Booknard was in fact an older word once used to describe the persons responsible for the professional wrangling of magical books – categorizing, tracking and tracing, handling, hauling, cleaning, detailing, re-shelving, and occasionally appeasing each one, throughout its stay in the place.

Though believed to have originally been used as a pejorative by the haughtiest of past wizards to describe their stout and tireless coworkers, the Booknards had since transformed their family name into a respected word in the ages-old profession, so essential to the College’s daily function. The name that had once signified a only a stout, working wretch by common wizard standards, had become instead a badge of greatest respect amongst those same folk, in time. Such was both the power and the mutability of a word or a name in that venerated place. Such was also the power of recognizing one’s role in the grander scheme of things, and making that clearly known. \*\*

\*\* For the best, concise account of the Dreadful Booknard Strikes of 404 A.R., see Plentium Forthwither’s most excellent treatise, The Many Things I Do Remember Correctly, published in 552 A.R., shortly before his final, epic Winking Out.

Still, it was not all so common for wizards of any nature or standing to socialize with the Booknards directly – they were too valuable to the machinery, and needed at the fringes, and in the shadows, out of sight and not underfoot, if most wizards were to have their druthers. A Booknard sighted in frivolous conversation or activity anywhere in the halls of the College was a Booknard clearly needed for some important task elsewhere. Frivolous conversation and activity were to be had by those who had earned that right, through birth, blessings, and occasional hard work.

Bardlii did not see things as other wizards did, however, and did not care about rules of etiquette, only laws of nature. Nature was vast, and its laws were always, to him, inscrutable and potentially limitless. Who needed to mix in the shallower, arbitrary laws of scholars, who had fleeting lives and capricious minds? Their laws changed too rapidly for Bardlii’s liking, and in ways he did not care to understand. Dangett had been his one true friend (his good parents did not count in this, he had come to learn), and Dangett had the great patience and wisdom of the crystal-bearing rock from which his kind had been hewn, almost nine centuries ago now, when the College was first being carved from the twin mountains it now permeated.

Bardlii was a magical construct, conceived in a laboratory by very loving parents, during a Long Spell lasting approximately half a year. Indistinguishable from a true person in every way that mattered, he lived his life as though he had been conceived as all normal human children were, because his parents taught him to live that way. It was the best way, in their opinion.

They had called him their miracle child, as many parents did of their own offspring, and still do. What manner of creating life will not feel like a miracle, to the happy recipients? That Bardlii’s parents chose to turn to their own profession – the magical arts – to create what they could not create through mundane methods (their words) surprised no one, given who they were. They were good and powerful wizards by that time, battle-tested and well-published, with an uncanny command of natural elements and raw power, both.

Dangett met Bardlii while the youth was in his first year of apprenticeship, under his great uncle Feztas, 11th Council member of the Board of Seventeen, of the 6th Council. I have mentioned this elder wizard already – the one who, at the time this story picks up, was teetering daily, from one moment to the next, at the brink of that colourful fold called the Shimmering, a place elder Wizards both aspire to and also shirk from their entire careers. The Shimmering is a powerful and solemn time in the lives of many other animals, and with Wizards in particular (don’t even get started about Dragonkind), the special effects accompanying the transition from mortal concerns to concerns of different kinds always made for fascinating scientific, social and diplomatic events at the College, and great dinner party conversation. The time when these men and women’s spirits began to shift hue beyond their kin’s ability to reach – even with the greatest and longest of spells - was of course sad as well, and so making light of the peculiarities of the experience was a traditional and accepted coping mechanism for everybody. Wizards were often not good at addressing their feelings plainly. This was commonly known.

Bardlii’s great uncle Feztas was – and as far as any other wizard could recall, had always been – obsessed with Bubble Magic. He was a prolific inventor, terrible instructor, and a hermit among hermits, locked as he was in a prison of his own devising, which was a cramped, cluttered laboratory with chronically bad ventilation, in the upper bowels of the College’s Southern peak. Finding the place was an exercise is random door-investigation and stairwell spelunking, to be kind. The directions from the main Hall to the elder wizard’s office laboratory were technically scribe-able on a single sheet of velum (double-sided), but it had become a challenge for the Wizards in his circle to attempt to find their way to the room by memorization and dead-reckoning alone. It was a point of pride, to have visited Feztas and then returned, without a cheat sheet or any other magical aid. Nobody attempting this adventure ever succeeded on their first try, and nobody who disappeared while attempting it did not (eventually) return from whence they started out\*.

Feztas often had a cauldron on full boil, and was at the moment

\* Some would emerge quite dehydrated and disoriented, and the game of finding one’s way to Feztas’s lab and back again without a map and travelling notes was eventually banned, for safety reasons. Feztas himself voted against the ban, since the practice had up led to far fewer drop-in visitors when maps and notes had been discouraged, but he was outvoted. This did not stop a few wizards from continuing the challenge in secret. There was, for example, at least one scoresheet rumoured to have been found hanging nearly a year later in the 3rd-sub-level East-facing lunch room, with dates and times of successful and unsuccessful sojourns updated monthly, disguised poorly as the mad ramblings of an elder, trying to dream his way toward some fabled treasure room thought to exist on the 11th North sub-basement, or thereabouts. The score sheet of course was eventually discovered, and a new one was posted in some other secret location, known only to the players of the Feztas-finding game, who called themselves the Sojourners, for kicks.

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"I need to sit down", finally said the engineer.

Does the key need to also compose the music, or conduct the orchestra? Why can't it just be a key, enthusiastically waiting to be called upon to make its beautiful sound in harmony with its kin, in service of a greater vision?

On Jun 15, 2017 6:22 PM, "Mike McGraw" <[mike.mcgraw@gmail.com](mailto:mike.mcgraw@gmail.com)> wrote:

The grizzly bear in the kitchen.

Quite literally, some days.

On Jun 15, 2017 5:13 PM, "Mike McGraw" <[mike.mcgraw@gmail.com](mailto:mike.mcgraw@gmail.com)> wrote:

On Jun 15, 2017 3:42 PM, "Mike McGraw" <[mike.mcgraw@gmail.com](mailto:mike.mcgraw@gmail.com)> wrote:

I am always writing.

I am pushing back my ego.

I remember.

I am Listening.

I am love.

I am ok.

I am helping.

I am humbling.

I am Profiled as a Good Person

Perhaps wizards cannot meet, while witches must? The sacred geometry of magic.

Chapter zero.

The Outliers.

Yes, I was a witch in love. I was a lot of things, in matters of love. And I was a witch in many, many more things than that, old man. I was a witch in the kitchen, like my mother, and hers, and I was a witch on the battlefield, more than once, and you know this well. I have the scars. Do you remember those? Where they fall on my skin, and how many there are now?

Oakely was trying to do the math in his head, having been presented with a numbers question, which he was sure he would get correct, and became unbalanced as she stepped another foot forward. The other witches, as was their nature, stepped lightly into subtle stances at her sides, but three full paces back, and not without an air of awkwardness. The lines between them, however, were clear, and they converged at the space just before the bridge of his nose, like a lit match.

He should have chosen better tactical ground. He had forgotten the rules of engagement.

I have been a witch for the people of this village, too - the one which loves me, the one which you left, without a second thought, so that you could go and fix another pipe, in some other town. You’re not here to say your peace, let’s be clear – you are here on a plumbing errand, and you and I both know you would rather it not be *here* that you have to do it.

“Bea-“

*Don’t Bea me*, Beattie cut his words short, with a raised finger, and a sharp, clear thought, and stepped back, with a barely perceptible waver. The nearly-forgotten fainting feelings had stirred in her again, and she had thought certainly she had conquered those, finally. This was half the reason she was so upset right now, though nobody but her sisters could – or would – know that.

Oakely, as always, was catching up, word by word, and felt stir an angry ember he thought had extinguished itself at least four years hence, maybe five. He was not a fixer of “pipes”. It was far, far more complicated than that. His old, younger self would have quickly bristled and boiled at the manner she always belittled the things he did – the things he *loved* – but he checked himself, as they were not alone, and he knew how to be civil, in company. He was outnumbered here anyway, within one whispering inch of a Jab, (triple-witched only, but those could still leave a mark, he knew it well), so he stepped back from the house by another step, away from its arrayed warding women, and inwardly tamped the fire in his belly down with Will’s help, steam rising slightly from the back of his neck as he did so.

Elmur seemed only mildly interested in the entire thing, and was taking in Oakely’s new height with characteristically keen interest. The men had always been a mismatch, height-wise, but this would require a complete recalibration of the old rubrics. Once they got around to that part of the reunion, that is. Elmur was not yet aware that the evening, as far as Oakely’s visit to the house was concerned, was very nearly already over. Had he known, he would have felt disappointed sooner, rather than slightly later.

Face reddened, struggling slightly with containing the pressure building in his various real and replacement parts, the engineer …

First of all, you should know that I am with your best, childhood friend Elmur now, and he is a saint. Yes, Oakely, an actual saint. He was sainted last Thursday, by bishoppess Noodlebury, in front of everybody we know.

..

Second, you have literally no right to be here, right now, or in the future, unless I see fit to grant you that right, sometime - a time of my own choosing - in the future.

That's not likely, is it? Witch Two whispered to witch One, when neither thought a crow was listening.

I was your bark, Oakely! Your actual, knotty, rigid, tenaciously thick, stupid bark, damn you! You were the unyielding, prideful, thick-beyond words or measures intention, striving and growing away from and out of me, always and upwards. And to what?

“To what?” She said again, to that empty moment of silence, to all of them and nobody in particular. “The crows only know”.

She turned slowly and walked away, at that, repeating "only the crows" to her self, in her retreat, her sisters-in-practice folding in behind her, like a curtain. The younger, Agnest, glanced back at Elmur and then to Oakely briefly, caring and uncertain. She hadn’t yet been through this mill, so she did not yet know – her heart was still bright.

Elmur just stood stoically through this brief moment, like the trentpole that he was. The day he first shuffled into town, everything had gotten more dry and comfortable generally, for everyone. This was commonly admitted to, to everybody's satisfaction\*.

\*Growing seasons needed dry spells too, was the going theory at that time.

idea bucket

And board game!

Give and peek,

Offer and keep.