

The Red Hen Essay Collection



Vol. 2

REGARDING THE
POTTERVERSE PART II

Harry Potter & The Dark Lord
With 20/20 Hindsight
Missed Opportunities



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**Harry Potter & The Dark Lord
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Regarding the Potterverse Part II

Harry Potter & The Dark Lord

Matters that are specific to Harry Potter and the wizard formerly known as Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Examines problems with Prophecies, and more extrapolations about Horcruxes than you ever wanted to have to deal with.

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Well, this is another line of exploration which is neither here nor there. My own earlier conclusions on the subject were not confirmed in DHs. But what Rowling finally told us regarding the matter there and elsewhere was sufficiently unconvincing that I am not prepared to rewrite the essay to reflect her claims.

In fact, I flatly reject her claims. Indeed, I go farther. I think that *if* what she finally gave us was what she had always intended, then she was clearly intending to scam us all from the beginning.

And I am not *actually* convinced of that, either. I think she just monumentally fumbled the ball.



Concerning Prophecies in General

In her website update of May 2005, JK Rowling answered a FAQ poll question regarding the significance of Neville Longbottom being the other candidate as the “Child Foretold” (i.e., essentially none). She also finally gave us some kind of explanation for what she thought she was playing at when she hung her whole tale on so dubious a hook as a Prophecy.

It was a bit of a relief to have it clearly confirmed that she was indeed re-playing Macbeth, and that the Prophecy was always intended to be self-fulfilling. Although, in fact “self-fulfilling” is hardly even needed as a determination where it comes to Prophecies in literature. In accordance with the sort of canned irony typically deployed in the use of Prophecies in literature just about *all* Prophecies in literature turn out to be self-fulfilling.

But it is clear that in the Potterverse there are Powers (or entities at least) which happily meddle in the affairs of men. Or those of wizards, anyway. Otherwise we would not be stuck



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having to deal with the fallout from a Prophecy.

And, whatever these meddling Powers may be, it is all too clear that they are *not* on the side of the Light, however much *some persons* may try to convince themselves this is the case. Considering what “Light” magic essentially is, i.e., *domesticated* magic, we would be fools to ever assume they were. There is *nothing* domesticated about a Prophecy.



Prophecies just about always turn out to be extremely bad news. In the first place, they offer a pernicious and gaudy temptation to take unwise action — which invariably brings disaster down upon the heads of those foolish enough not to resist.

As has obviously happened in this instance. The Department of Mysteries was on the right track when they adopted a manner of dealing with the records of such pronouncements very much in the style of disposing of toxic waste. It is assuredly no “friendly” entity which torments mortals with Prophecies.

What is more: the bloody things aren’t even true! Can anyone really suppose that more than a fraction of all the hundreds — indeed, thousands — of “genuine” Prophecies recorded in the archives of the DoM ever came to pass, once the record was successfully suppressed and there was no one who knew enough to try to do something about it? I don’t.

And Albus Dumbledore hypocritically points this out to us.

If the bulk of the Prophecies made never come to pass unless people are told of them, HOW can they be regarded as “true” Prophecies?

They are a snare and a delusion.



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And they are generated by spontaneous bursts of Wild magic. Which is to say, *Dark* magic.

Think about it. What are the hallmarks of Dark magic?

Wandless. Check.

Forceful rather than controlled. Check.

Perilous. Check.

Deceptive. Check (boy howdy).

Chaotic. Check and *double-check*.

The Dark Arts are: according to Professor Snape; “Many, varied, ever-changing, eternal. ...unfixed, mutating, indestructible.”

Right. We are the Dark Arts. Deceptions ‘R’ Us.

Sure sounds like Prophecies qualify to me.

And, yet, all of that being the case; the entities responsible for the pernicious things occasionally send in a ringer, just to keep everyone hopping. There wasn’t a lot that was bogus about Trelawney’s second Prophecy, was there?



But, still, if confronted with one of the things, you would be a unmitigated fool to count on it.

Back before HBP came out, I had originally thought that if Dumbledore hadn’t been so quickly tipped off about the eavesdropper — who had gotten away — he’d have tried to suppress the first Trelawney Prophecy, as well, in accordance with all established policy.

I also believed that once he knew that at least part of it had already escaped, he felt did not have that luxury.

But, at that point I seriously doubted that he ever in the ensuing 16 years let slip any more of its content than the part



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he realized that the eavesdropper had already heard. Or not until he shared it with us all at the end of OotP.

After HBP I was forced to rethink that particular reading of the situation.

In the first place; it seemed almost guaranteed to be *wrong*.

With the publication of HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE, Ms Rowling handed us a glaring contradiction which offered us a whole new range of possibilities. None of them very reassuring possibilities, either. Well, except to the die-hard Snape apologists. There was a great deal of cause for rejoicing in that quarter.



Back with the release of Order of the Phoenix we had finally been given a couple of pieces of information which threw some of our earlier speculations — or at least *my* earlier speculations — off by a generous margin.

The most obvious of these was related to the Trelawney Prophecy itself. Not so much in the text of it — although that *does* matter, even if not as much as first appears (since DHs the text of it has been demonstrated to be completely bas-ackward and a lie besides), but about the time that the Prophecy must have been made. The prophecy was worded in a manner to strongly imply that it was made *before* the child it foretold was born.

In fact, there is strong indication that it could have been made *quite some time* before the promised child was born, for Dumbledore claims that his meeting with Trelawney took place on a “cold, wet night” which certainly does not sound to me as if the meeting is likely to have taken place at all close to the end



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of July — which was the date believed to be specified for the child's birth.

Or was it?



This was our first big snag. Despite Rowling's determination to stick her fingers in her ears and warble "La-la-la!" the text of that Prophecy is not anything like as straightforward as she pretends it is. Given that we were led to believe that it was the impending date of the foretold child's birth that was the only real identifying factor for the whole business, we suddenly were handed another wrinkle to have to iron out.

Because you would not necessarily be able to determine an estimated date from what that Prophecy has to say about it, not even if you *did* know when it was made.

And we don't. Even if we did, there are at *least* three, and anything up to five, different interpretations of possible dates folded into the description of; "as the 7th month dies". And there is no indication to determine which interpretation is the right one without additional outside information.

In the first place; as is fitting for spontaneous bursts of Dark magic, Prophecies are notoriously opaque in their language. To the point that you generally can only figure them out after they have come to pass, and you finally have the opportunity to reason them out backward, with 20/20 hindsight. And this one seemed to be no exception.

(ETA: actually it is. Wait for it.)

For that matter; in the event, Rowling didn't even have the decency to demonstrate to us that it *had* played out as predicted.

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Which was probably unavoidable, since it didn't. Even our bone-headed Harry managed to figure out *that* much, and said so.

By all the established tropes of the use of Prophecy in literature (not mythology, which is something else again, myths are created to serve gods, not plots) if there had been any way that the date of the child's birth could have been accurately projected ahead of time then it must have been because either there was something about the circumstances under which the Prophecy was made which would have made the timing less ambiguous than the actual wording of it suggests, or the deciding factor pertaining to the event was a piece of outside information, known to the hearers, but not mentioned in the text of the pronouncement itself. And we, the readers, were never given any such piece of information.

Or else we were supposed to assume that Albus just hit upon the correct date by sheer dumb luck. Which, downstream of DHs appears to be what Rowling believes. Everything in DHs seems to be dumbed down to the point of offering the least resistance to the author's determination to spit the last segment of the tale out without having to stop and properly explain anything.

We thought we were dealing with a 3000-piece puzzle here. It turns out to have been replaced by a 300-piece one at the last minute.



Still, in any attempt to establish some kind of verisimilitude, in order for the date in the Prophecy to play out unambiguously as referring to the end of July there must have appeared to be something about the pronouncement which would allow for no

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confusion or counter suggestion.

And as it was presented to us that simply was not the case.

Or, given that we were originally told in PoA that Voldemort did not make up his mind to kill the Potters' child until over a year after the child was born, and anything up to two years after the time that the Prophecy may have been made, it is possible that something was known, or later revealed to Dumbledore — and to Dumbledore *alone* — which made the context clear to *him*, even only in retrospect. And that Voldemort only figured it out later. Or he got help.

Which would also be entirely according to tradition.

(ETA: all of this reasoning was contradicted in DHs, btw, without any alternate explanation. Rowling must really think her readers are morons.)

Such additional information would need to be of a sort that Lord Voldemort had no initial access to, and probably which had only been worked out by outside means. Given that the target date as the Prophecy was actually worded was; “as the 7th month dies,” on the surface it would have been far too easy to confuse whether this referred to the 7th month of the calendar year, or the 7th month after the Prophecy was made — unless this pronouncement was made in January 1980 and, consequently, was going to be applicable to the month of July — regardless of either interpretation.

And for that matter, even from the vantage point of January 1980 the issue of the 7th month = July is *still* not a done-deal. Regardless of *either* of those interpretations. Because “the 7th month” could *STILL* have referred to something else altogether.

It could have referred to the *name* of the month.

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Yes, unfortunately, July is *not* the only possible interpretation of “the 7th month.” Not even the only *obvious* interpretation, particularly considering that the month name “September” *literally* translates out to “*seventh month*.”

Which, in a society which clearly makes heavy use of dog-Latin on an everyday basis, throws a major wild card into the mix, making us wonder *how* Dumbledore could possibly be so confident that the Prophecy referred to Harry, or to Neville, or to the month of July.

And the literal meaning of the name “September” is hardly obscure information. I think I’d encountered it *in school* by the time I was 12. The 7th month is only July if you are either 9 years old and ignorant, or if you’re not paying attention.

It also has been pointed out to me that the reference to the 7th month could, within very traditional parameters, also refer to a child born two months premature (“MacDuff was from his mother’s womb, untimely ripp’d”), or even one merely born a socially embarrassing 7 months into a marriage.

And while we’re at it, just to be difficult, why are we convinced that the Prophecy demons have adopted the Gregorian calendar? Is there anything in that pronouncement that disqualifies the possibility that it was alluding to *lunar* months?

And, while Rowling herself may feel perfectly secure in her knowledge that *she* was referring to July. None of her characters could have had that certainty.

Which could explain a part of Voldemort’s delay in following up on it.



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But, as to the timing of when the Prophecy was actually made; that “cold, wet night” which Dumbledore remembers still doesn’t sound much like July. Or any time during the summer, even though it *does* rain in Britain in the summer.

I have to admit that it doesn’t really sound much like January, either. In fact, what it sounds most like to me is Halloween.

Right about when the child it allegedly foretells was conceived.

Or maybe some days afterward.

I’m inclined to doubt that the Prophecy demons would have burped one up in order to entrap Albus (and it *was* to entrap Albus, nothing whatsoever to do with Tom) until the child it foretells actually *existed*. However embryonically.

I’ll admit that I never, until around the Spring of 2006, gave much consideration to the theory — which was definitely already out there — that the Prophecy might have been made at the time of the foretold child’s conception. But the more you look at it the more likely it seems.

That would also probably be the time that the Prophecy demons might be most active and ready to do mischief. Particularly considering what time of year we are talking about. In most folklore, certainly in *British* folklore, the barriers between the seen and unseen worlds are said to be at their thinnest around Halloween.

And in quasi-support of that theory, we have Trelawney’s statement as to just when she started teaching at Hogwarts. Professor Trelawney’s class was the very first one where we saw Umbridge making a nuisance of herself with her clipboard. And she was doing that before the end of September. Ergo: Trelawney’s statement made in September of 1995 was that she



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had — at that specific date — been working at Hogwarts for “almost 16 years”. Not 16 years. “*Almost*” 16 years.

Snape, by contrast had been teaching at Hogwarts for 14 years that term. So Trelawney had been teaching for more than one full year before Snape joined the Hogwarts staff. But not for two full years. And we know she didn’t start teaching before she gave that Prophecy.

And in peripheral quasi-canon, if we’re really supposed to accept Regulus Black’s death date as actually being in 1979 then Rowling has nailed it down solidly for us. There is no way that I believe that Tom would be borrowing a disposable Elf to hide his Horcrux before he knew of the existence of the Prophecy.

In 1979.

However, I must in all honesty admit that I no longer accept the Tapestry dates as given for either Regulus Black’s birth or death dates.

Even if I do now think it likely that the Prophecy was made around Halloween. In 1979.



So, okay, why was Dumbledore at the Hog’s Head in the first place? Consider: this was allegedly a job interview. The probability is that such an interview would be held during a term break to fill a vacant position. But we do not know that this was the case. It may not have been. The previous Divination instructor could have flaked out a couple of months into the term, leaving the Headmaster holding the bag.

If a position fell vacant suddenly, and a candidate, learning of this (quite possibly from the previous instructor), contacted



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Dumbledore, he might schedule an interview at any time during the year. And he could have met them for an interview by simply taking a walk into Hogsmeade any evening after dinner in the Great Hall. He is already in a habit of doing that from time to time. If Sybill had a source of information that tipped her off that the position was just coming vacant, she might have nipped in with her application well before the next term break, at Christmas.

For that matter, Albus tells us that he was considering allowing the class to lapse. That actually makes it sound as if it may have fallen vacant at the end of the previous year and he had simply not made much of an attempt to fill it. But we can't count on that.

While we're at it; we already have another precedent for new staff being hired on after the Academic year has commenced. Minerva McGonagall stated, with her characteristically hairsplitting accuracy, that *she* will have been teaching at Hogwarts for "39 years this December." Or, in other words, that she had started in January, 1957.



There are three main term breaks during Hogwarts's academic year. There is the long summer break, which would normally be the most reasonable time to fill a position; but that would throw the "7th month" projection into serious confusion, and if Sybill had started at the end of the summer break there would have been no "almost" in her statement of how long she had been at the school.

The 7th month after such an interview, if it took place in July



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or August, would be February or March, throwing the matter into enough of a quagmire of uncertainty as just what the target date was as to make it uncertain that anybody would be able to come to any sort of a conclusion on it without outside assistance.

There is also a break between the spring and summer terms, loosely referred to as the "Easter" break. If this is meant literally, this break must shift around year by year to accommodate Easter, which has a range of possible dates which spreads over the space of a lunar month. This break would be sometime in March/April, dividing the stretch from January to June roughly into two 3-month terms. The 7th month from this point would land around Halloween, which would also miss the literally so-named "seventh month" by a reasonable enough margin to make any projection too uncertain to really be able to call it accurately, and also lands us nowhere near July.

And, finally, there is the Christmas break at the end of December, extending into the first week or so of January. The 7th month from this point would coincide with the 7th month of the calendar year, offering at least the possibility of getting a fix on a projected date at the end of July without a lot of additional ambiguity.

IF one ignores the "September" maybe-clue. Which they probably couldn't afford to do.



But from Halloween, right in the middle of the long Autumn term, the 7th month would indicate the end of May.

If the Prophecy was made, either after Halloween, or in January, everyone involved had time to prepare for the event of



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that birth, even if they couldn't be certain just when that birth would fall. (Unless everybody involved is a lot less effective than we had been given to believe. Or at least not until DHs came out, and everyone was suddenly a moron.) And even if "July" was only a lucky guess and the Prophecy was delivered on an unseasonably cold and rainy night at the end of June, there was still time to set some powerful protective measures in motion. Yet there is very little overt indication that this was done.

In fact, despite the fact that Albus at least supposedly knew of their potential danger since well before the kid was born, according to Cornelius Fudge, the Potters were not credited with being aware that Voldemort was even after them, and did not go into hiding until about a week before their deaths, which was anything up to two years after the Prophecy had been made. And, unfortunately, we are forced to have to seriously consider the matter with this statement in mind, since both Hagrid and Minerva McGonagall were present when Fudge made that statement, and they did not correct him.

Rowling implied in interviews and on her original website that the Potters may have been in some form of hiding for quite some time before Mr Fudge claims they were; that in fact they were ready to bolt into hiding around the time of Harry's birth. Conversely, she has also tried to claim that they went "into hiding" as soon as Lily announced her pregnancy. And in DHs finally officially gave us strong indication that they had been living "in hiding" since at least Harry's first birthday, and only went under the Fidelius Charm the week before Voldemort finally caught them. Frankly, by this time it is easiest to conclude that Ms Rowling simply cannot be bothered to keep track



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of the background details of her own story and just kept making different things up, expecting us to believe whatever she chose to say on alternate Tuesdays. But clearly Fudge didn't know what he was talking about.

The fact that the Potters, according to Lily's letter to Sirius, were living quietly, but nevertheless still interacting with other wizarding residents in Godric's Hollow, such as Bathilda Bagshott, sounds rather as though the Potters had removed to Godric's Hollow to a house that had been provided for them. Possibly one protected by a number of security spells such as those on The Weasleys' Aunt Muriel's house, that of the Tonks', or of #12 before they finally added the protection of the Fidelius charm. For it does not sound as if Bathilda had known James from his childhood, or, more to the point, that he had known her, which would have been the case had the house they were living in been his parents'.



So how much did the Potters know regarding the Prophecy? Given that Albus hasn't even informed Trelawney that she once spouted a Prophecy concerning the fall of the Dark Lord in his presence, I'm not convinced that either the Potters or the Longbottoms were ever informed that Voldemort might specifically intend to target their children. He had presumably tried to kill all of them three times already, wouldn't that alone have been enough to make them wary?

Albus does claim that he and Harry are the only people who know the full text of the Prophecy, but he does *not* say that they are the only people who have ever known it. It's possible



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that he had filled them all in. Uncharacteristic, but possible.

On her original web site, and in the joint interview of July 2005 Rowling specifically told us (in response to the question of whether Harry has a godmother) that Harry's christening (early in August of 1980) was a hurried, secretive affair in which Sirius was named his sole godparent, and that the Potters were half afraid that they would need to go into hiding at any moment. Yet according to PoA, the news that they were the subject of Voldemort's personal attentions did not come until 15 months afterward.

Which, if everyone was all on the same page, is inexplicable.

Nor does the addition of the memory of Severus Snape meeting Albus on a windy hilltop at a time of year which is clearly some time after Halloween to report the Potters' danger and to plead for Lily's life clarify the matter. Indeed it only confuses it farther. The Occam's Razor special here is that Albus merely extorted Snape's agreement to spy for him, and told no one of this meeting.

The most immediate reading of these contradictory statements is that Rowling made some blunders. Not fatal ones, perhaps, but ones that are highly inconvenient to subsequent analysis. This information may have been all very well for Dramatic Tension, but, if true, it suggests yet another in a lengthening string of weaknesses regarding Dumbledore's ability to effectively plan ahead for emergencies. And I'm not convinced that Rowling intended that, although in the wake of DHs it has become a valid possibility.



More recently, however, I wondered whether the blunders

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were not Rowling's but Albus's. And the evidence for that reading was beginning to mount up. Even more so once the Live-Journalist known as Swythiv (aka as my "fellow traveler") had reported another message from the subconscious. I thought she might be on to something.

First, however: the evidence was also mounting up to suggest that Rowling absolutely *did* intend for us to notice Trelawney's sweeping contradiction of Albus Dumbledore's recounting of the events pertaining to his hearing the Prophecy at the Hog's Head that we were suddenly handed in the chapter entitled 'The Seer Overheard' of HBP. This particular contradiction is of *overwhelming* importance to matters which are pivotal to anybody trying to work out a comprehensive theory of the series's back-story, what trajectory the story arc was likely to take from this point on, or of the continuing role of former Professor Snape.

According to the story we were given at the end of OotP, Dumbledore states — in no uncertain terms — that an eavesdropper was discovered part-way through the Prophecy. He was thrown from the building, and never heard the rest of it. We were left to assume that Dumbledore was informed of this very quickly afterwards. (Understandable, given that the barman of the Hog's Head both now, and at the time of the Prophecy was made was, in fact, Albus Dumbledore's brother, Aberforth — as had been confirmed by Rowling in the Edinburgh Book Festival interview, August 2004.)

Consequently, Albus would have been forced to consider, from the very first, the likelihood that any information which was overheard *might* eventually make its way to Voldemort. He could not assume that the Dark Lord would not eventually dis-

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cover that a Prophecy concerning himself had been made. Particularly considering the general clientele of the Hog's Head, which had been a low-ranking dodgy clientelles' and Death Eater wannabes' dive since even before there officially were Death Eaters.

After the fact, one is forced to wonder how Albus could be so certain that only *one* part of the Prophecy had actually been overheard, given that it can't have taken more than a minute to *make* that Prophecy. There just isn't that much to it. But, if he had heard a scuffle as the eavesdropper was discovered and ejected, the timing of the disturbance might have accounted for that.



Well, that interpretation, like a great deal else, had now been violently Levicorpused by the contradicting version of the events of that evening which was told to Harry by Sybill Trelawney shortly before the run-up to the climax of HBP.

According to Dumbledore in OotP, the first part of the Prophecy was overheard, the eavesdropper ejected, and that, consequently, Voldemort only ever was told the first part of the Prophecy. Plus, by all of the cloak-and-dagger nonsense of OotP over the bloody Prophecy record we have a fairly clear indication that, yes indeed, Voldemort was only aware of the first part of the Prophecy, and he wanted very much to hear the rest.

Moreover, at the end of OotP, we had also been shown Dumbledore's Pensieve memory of Trelawney actually *giving* the Prophecy. She was in her trance and delivered the Prophecy in one burst, without breaks or interruptions. The memory was a true memory, showing none of the sorry, cut-and-paste evidence of tampering that the first version of Slughorn's memory



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displays in the course of HBP. Indeed we watched Dumbledore extract that memory himself, immediately before replaying it. He did not mess with it.

Unless, of course, Albus had cropped it and there was something additional stated before or after the portion we heard, but we had no reason to believe that he did so.

An additional point: it had also been clear from as early as PoA that Trelawney has no self-awareness of what she is doing or what is going on around her when she is in the grip of the Prophecy demons. What we saw was what she said.

And yet *her* version of the events of that evening is considerably different from Dumbledore's. She states that she had started to feel a little odd, presumably from not having eaten, and immediately afterward there was a commotion at the door, and then the door flew open to reveal the barman — and Severus Snape.

But... but... she would not have become aware of her surroundings to the point of registering the commotion at the door until *after* she had completed delivering the Prophecy. If Severus Snape *is still at the door* after Sybill has *finished* giving the Prophecy, and was actually able to stand there making excuses about coming up the wrong staircase when it was over, how can Albus state so confidently that Snape only heard the first part? And, yet, it is clear from later events that Voldemort was only *told* that first part.

What is more: it is clear from this testimony that Albus and Aberforth had Snape in their custody, and let him get away.

Without Obliviating a critical couple of minutes from his memory. It isn't like Albus won't permit someone to do that.

He didn't make the slightest attempt to stop Shackbolt



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from Obliviating Marrietta Edgecombe when it suited him. And that issue was just as critical as this was! Particularly in view of the established Ministry policy of suppressing Prophecies. They've clearly been doing it for centuries.

And if Sybill is telling the truth — and we have no reason to suppose she isn't — then the responsibility for the whole outcome sits squarely at Albus's door. Aberforth did not come across someone listening at a keyhole, throw them out of his pub on his own authority, and tell his brother about it later. Whatever was done, was done with Albus's knowledge and approval.

So what gives?

Well, downstream of DHs we know damned well that Albus is a liar. And I don't think he was nearly as dismissive of Prophecies back in 1979 or '80 as he was claiming to be by '96.

Sybill also states that Snape himself claimed to be looking for a job at the school at the time that her own interview took place. This is despite the fact that we've been told, twice now, that Snape only began teaching in September 1981, nearly two years after the Prophecy may have been made.

On *that* issue, at least, it is entirely possible that Sybil's information may be faulty. She is really not a particularly credible witness, and the fact that Snape joined the staff later may in itself be what convinces her that he was already looking for a job then.

But we cannot count on this. In fact, we can no longer count on *anything* that we have been told concerning the circumstances under which the Trelawney Prophecy was made. Because Rowling (and presumably Albus) is messing with our heads.



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I do not write conventional fanfic. Even if some of my theories bear it a strong resemblance. I attempt to interpret the material that Rowling has given us, and develop theories from it. As a theorist, I have to pick and choose what I am going to draw my conclusions from, out of *all* of what Rowling has given us to work with, as amplified by my own understanding of the workings of human behavior and natural and social "law." And it is my duty to justify wherein I accept or I reject what Rowling has handed me to work with, when what she gives me is contradictory.

Far too much of what Rowling gives us in DHs is too blatantly contradictory to the rest of the series for me to accept that book as a valid conclusion to the series as the series had been set up.

Ergo: I keep reverting to how the series stood at the end of HBP and reasoning from there. It still made *sense* from there. Mostly.

With this in mind, I am forced to have to accept Trelawney's version of this event over Albus's. Even if only because the whole purpose of the Trelawney->Harry conversation is that Rowling was so clearly determined to convey the information that Snape was indeed the previously unnamed eavesdropper, and, therefore, the DE who informed Voldemort of the incomplete Prophecy.

So, unless the events pertaining to the Prophecy fell out the way that Trelawney *claims* that they did, there would have been no opportunity for HER to be able to identify that eavesdropper at all.

And nobody seems to be asking Aberforth anything.

Which opens a whole other can of worms; introducing the conclusion that, unlikely as it seemed at the time, Dumbledore *must* have deliberately misrepresented the events when he



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“told Harry everything” the year before. In fact, Albus had told Harry nothing *remotely* associated with “everything.”

And, even in the wake of DHs it is still fairly evident that Dumbledore seldom flat-out lies. Or, not without what we can see that he believes to be a very good reason.

He had, however, already been shown to do so to protect Harry, and in the very same book, too. He flat-out lied to Fudge, claiming to Fudge that HE had formed the DA, and that Marrietta had ratted out what had been intended to be the very first meeting.



Well, see it once in this series and you are almost guaranteed to see it again.

It *seemed* clear, after the fact, that Rowling’s whole purpose of the “grand contradiction” of the disparity between Albus and Trelawney’s accounts of the night of the Prophecy was to serve as yet another hint that yes, Albus Dumbledore lies when he feels it is necessary.

And, right off the top, he had *excellent* reason to lie to Harry at the end of OotP. What he told Harry was almost certain to be exactly the same story that Snape had told Tom. Albus had a great deal invested in keeping *those* stories straight.

I also believed that Albus *would* lie to protect one of his own agents, if he felt it was necessary. We watched him do it for Harry. More than once. And at the time he “told Harry everything” Albus was absolutely convinced that Snape was one of his own agents as well. For that matter, Albus’s story is also calibrated to protect *Trelawney*, who never had any idea of the



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danger she was in. The revelation that she not only knows the identity of Voldemort’s informant, but was aware of the circumstances under which he came by his information can do no one involved any kind of good.

We also have not heard from everyone who was involved in that incident. Neither Snape nor Aberforth were ever directly heard from regarding it, although I think that we can take for granted that their “public” versions of the matter would have supported Albus’s. But the public version of the proceedings is clearly not the full, or even the most accurate one. Which opens up a couple of other possibilities.

For example: maybe the reason Trelawney is convinced that Snape was job-hunting at the same time she was is because after Albus finished his interview with her, he made a point of having a few words privately with Snape. It is certainly no great stretch of the imagination to suppose as much.

For that matter Albus may have simply brushed the intrusion off by telling Sybill that Snape had also wished to speak to him about a job, in order to deflect further questions. And Snape may have told Voldemort that he had excused himself when caught listening at the door by claiming that he was waiting to speak to Dumbledore about the DADA position after Dumbledore finished with his other interview, but had been tossed out of the Hog’s Head anyway.

(Which would have been witnessed by anyone who was in the place, if Voldemort decided to verify Snape’s claim.)

But I really did think that I was onto something here, and that Rowling had *meant* the contradiction to be there, and meant it to be noticed. Because there was already independent sugges-



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tion that there is something very fishy about these contradictory accounts elsewhere in HBP. At Spinners' End, in fact.

At first glance it appeared that Rowling had forced Snape to be just a little bit careless in his accounting of past events regarding the reasons for and the results of his tardiness in his appearance at the graveyard in Little Hangleton. In his attempt to score off Bellatrix and her grand gesture of sending herself off to Azkaban, he states that by his delay in responding to the summons, he had maintained his cover as Voldemort's spy at Hogwarts, and had been able to deliver *sixteen* years' worth of information on Dumbledore's activities.

In GoF Voldemort had just returned from an absence of *fourteen* years.

Even at the point that Snape is telling the sisters about it in his own sitting room, a full year later. Voldemort had only disappeared close to fifteen years earlier.

...Y'know, I have never believed the claim that Dumbledore's trust in Snape was based on no more than the 8 weeks or so that Snape was teaching at the school before Voldemort's defeat at Godric's Hollow. In fact, that was the primary stumbling block that kept me sitting on the fence regarding Snape's underlying loyalties even after OotP.

Ergo: Snape had to have been in close enough contact with Dumbledore to be able to claim to be making retroactive reports of Albus's (since discovered) activities for the better part of two years before Voldemort's defeat at Godric's Hollow.

Since, in short, right about the time that Trelawney may have made her Prophecy.

Or, in other words he was able to report that he had *also*

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managed to worm his way into Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix, in the interim. And to learn about its past activities. Which probably was of no material advantage at all, but was a gaudy detail to enhance his own potential value as a spy.



Which opens some interesting but ultimately unprofitable lines of inquiry.

The following has been hosed by DHs, but frankly what Rowling gave us in return wasn't a fair trade for it. Unless you are a die-hard Snape-hater. I think my version makes a potentially stronger story.

So, to proceed:

Point: by the time of the Trelawney Prophecy, Voldemort had been "on the rise" for something close to 20 years.

Point: by the time the Prophecy was made Albus Dumbledore could have hardly been unaware that his own course of inaction (which might actually be unfair, he may have simply not been able to bring himself to follow through on whatever action he had taken) as pertained to young Tom Riddle had contributed substantially to the rise of "Lord Voldemort." And while Albus appears to be much better than the average wizard at avoiding direct personal responsibility, he is not immune to shame. He may feel he needs to try to put this right.

Point: at the time of the Prophecy, Dumbledore may not yet know about the Horcruxes (or does he? This is a question for a different essay, I think). But he certainly knows that the former Tom Riddle has been dealing for decades in something exceedingly Dark which has profoundly changed him from a normal,

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if powerful, human wizard to something which can barely be classified as human at all. There are just not a lot of ways of achieving even limited immortality. And from the name Riddle publicly adopted as early as his return from his first exile it is an open suggestion that immortality is his main goal, and that, if he has made any real progress in this direction, he will be very difficult to remove.

And upon reflection, I don't really think that we *can* take Albus at his word when he claims that he knew nothing about Voldemort and his Horcruxes until Harry handed him the neutralized Diary. I suspect that the list of methods that would render a wizard deathless is every bit as short as the list of monsters that are stone-turners.

And Albus clearly knows *about* Horcruxes. Slughorn states quite clearly in the critical memory, taken back in '42 or '43, that Albus was particularly fierce upon the subject. Which had already resulted in the subject being banned at Hogwarts — and that was Albus's doing. That statement was made on Dippet's watch, more than a dozen years before Albus ever became Headmaster.

Nevertheless: it may have been only Voldemort's failure to die when he was physically destroyed at Godric's Hollow which finally convinced Albus that Voldemort must, indeed, have created a Horcrux. And that it was only the examination of the Riddle Diary some years later which absolutely confirmed his suspicion that Riddle had created more than one of them. He may have already suspected that Riddle had created a Horcrux from the Locket, the Ring, and/or the Cup, even if he didn't know which one of them the Horcrux was. But he hadn't a clue



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about the Diary. And if Tom would make a Horcrux out of *that*, he would certainly have already made another one. Ergo; he had to have made *more* than one of them.

Not to mention his suspicions regarding the child's scar. He would not have had those suspicions unless he had already concluded that here was at least one Horcrux in play.



So just where was Albus coming from when Trelawney burped up a Prophecy in his presence?

Keep in mind that we also get a certain amount of suggestion in canon that the war had recently taken a turn for the worse. The Ministry may have implemented its shoot-to-kill policy about that time, and that must have been in response to something. Albus Dumbledore can hardly have been in favor of this development, for it set a very bad precedent. The policy has to have been approved by the Wizengamot — probably over his objections — in reaction to some sudden escalation or advantage being displayed by the enemy.

Point: this maybe-Prophecy of Trelawney's is probably the most hopeful development that Dumbledore's seen in years. It's completely chaotic, and it would mean going directly counter to Ministry policy of suppressing the things to do anything about it.

But it's been given to *him* and he can choose to deploy it if he dares to. By this point in the war he'll do that, in a good enough cause. Even though he knows that it is going to cost him dearly.

Point: he knows most of Riddle's weaknesses, but he also knows Riddle's wariness. If he allowed Riddle to learn of this Prophecy in its entirety, there is a good chance that Tom will



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resist the temptation to do anything about it.

So far, I suspect that my reasoning won't get a whole lot of argument. There is ample support in canon to suggest that the above is at least a viable, even if not necessarily the correct interpretation of the situation by the time the Trelawney Prophecy was made.

The fact is that to deliberately permit *any* fraction of the Prophecy to be circulated is in direct violation of Ministry Policy, but we have already seen that in some matters, such as the creation of unauthorized portkeys, Albus considers himself wiser than the Ministry. This may be another one of those cases. Particularly factoring in the possibility of Dumbledore's own escalating shame over not having already stopped Riddle, and the need to make amends, in his own eyes, if nothing else. He may even welcome the prospect of accepting the ruin that the Prophecy will almost certainly bring down upon himself if it also will take out Tom.

And, as Swythv had just pointed out to me, Albus and his subordinates may have felt that they *had* the right to risk meddling with the Prophecy, because they believed that it was about *them*.

We were never given the date of Albus's birthday.

We got the year. But not the day.

Prophecies are phrased in order to offer the broadest interpretation possible. Swythv goes farther, she has dubbed this sort of Prophecy-speak as "bafflegab," and points out that when one is speaking in bafflegab, things are phrased so that what are really multiple clauses are deliberately conflated to sound like a single clause, what appears to be a single meaning



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often is really referring to more than one thing, and just about everything in it can be turned around to refer to something else altogether. Often its direct opposite.

So let's take another look at that Prophecy, shall we?

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Okay. There is a strong suggestion in there that the Prophecy is talking about someone who has not yet been born. But there is nothing in there to say that it *isn't* talking about the circumstances of the birth of someone who is already alive. Especially to someone who may not have studied divination, but is old enough to know something about Prophecies and their bafflegab.

There were two people who were revealed to Albus to have been "approaching" that door that night as the Prophecy was being made. Namely, Snape and Aberforth.

There is no rational starting point or arcane calendar that would put Snape's January 9 birthday at the end of any "7th month." Unless, perhaps, we are talking about lunar months, and I respectfully decline to entertain that possibility. So it doesn't seem likely that the "born as the 7th month dies" bit could refer to him.

We don't know Aberforth's birthday, although it seems likely to me that it may have been in the autumn. Quite possibly at the



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end of September. And, as I say, we don't know Albus's birthday either. But he *could* have been born at the end of July, as Harry was. In fact, all the more reason for Albus to be assuming that the Prophecy referred to himself, or to July, if he was.

And, after all, he was reasonably sure that Tom didn't have a clue that Albus was now carrying the Elder wand. That was almost certainly something that Tom Riddle "knew not."



Although, just to be ornery, allow me to point out that at no point in that "Prophecy" was the enemy it refers to ever identified as the Dark Lord *Voldemort*. He's hardly the *first* "Dark Lord," is he? Nor will he be the last. There is nothing at all in that pronouncement which disqualifies it from referring to some Dark Lord who *might* someday rise in the 22nd century. Nor that "the One's" long approach might not be due to some policy which has only just now been put into place.



So okay, let's set all that aside for the moment and take a look at the other qualifications listed.

"*Born to those who have thrice defied him.*" Well, hey, no shortage of candidates there. The wretched thing could also be referring to *group* defiance there. Not just any *single* person who has defied him thrice, but to "those" who have done so. Any Ministry wonk would probably qualify on that head. Albus, and his brother, and all his little Phoenixes, too (assuming the Order even existed yet, which I still tend to doubt), certainly would qualify.

For that matter, Albus has been thwarting Tom ever since he

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met him. And he and his agents certainly have made a career of it.

And here they all are together, people who have set themselves up to oppose Riddle. Defiant ones. What is more, Albus knows that he himself is the only wizard that Tom is inclined to fear.

About now, allow me to point out that the whole business of the Potters being "thrice defiant" has been glitchy and unclear from the beginning of the series. We were never told or shown even one notable act of defiance on the part of either Lily OR James until the night Tom killed them.

Rowling has spackled this particular gap over with the pseudo-explanation that defiance means escaping being killed by the Dark Lord or his DEs. Which really comes across as completely bogus upon any attempt at closer examination. I doubt that is a definition of the term that you will find in any dictionary. But it is part of what we are stuck with having to work from, and it is every bit as unsatisfactory as the concept of trying to oppose Dark wizards without a clear definition of what Dark magic is.

By that definition Harry "defied" Voldemort as a baby, and I am not sure that is an accurate statement from any point of view. Harry *has* actively refused to cooperate, on stage, multiple times over the course of the series, so *those* would all certainly all qualify as acts of defiance, but not his survival when he was a baby.

And as for any power the Dark Lord knows not, the Dumbledore brothers (and Snape) between them certainly had that. Particularly if Albus was right and the Power to vanquish/ the Power he Knows Not really *is* no more than the ability to form human attachments (it wasn't). Just about everyone in the whole Potterverse *except* Tom has *that* power.

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It is clear that the Prophecy applies to Harry now because Tom *made* it apply to Harry (or made it *look* like it did). But from the vantage point of when the thing was made, it could have applied to just about anyone who had ever disagreed with Tom. Including little Billy Stubbs or Mrs Cole.

And, of course Tom had already marked Severus. But hardly as an equal.

Around this time, and if one attempts to focus on the matter from the point of view of someone who was convinced the Prophecy refers to the three wizards who were actually *there* when it was made, it almost begins to look as if there may have been yet other reasons for why it seems to have been considered necessary for Snape to be the one who murdered Albus. But I wouldn't count on it. We are dealing with bafflegab, after all.

And at that point none of them seems to have considered that the Prophecy might refer to a child.

Prophecies and hubris traditionally go hand in hand. I think they did this time, too.



I strongly suspect that the decision Albus made concerning that Prophecy constitutes Dumbledore's third great blunder.

His first was letting himself be carried away with Gellert Grindelwald and his grandiose plans to rule the world. (From the letter that Rita published, it sounds very much like he thought he should be in charge of *that* project, too. Because he was anything up to a whole year *older* than Gellert.) It's hard to say just how seriously Albus actually took that plan at the time. It really was the kind of proposal that could have gone no



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farther than a lot of foolish talk and blue sky pie. It must have been a nasty shock to discover that Gellert was completely serious about it.

His second blunder, of course, was his mishandling the matter of Tom Riddle. And he botched that pretty much from the moment he first encountered Riddle as a child. The business over Tom served as a salutary lesson that *not* getting involved could do every bit as much damage as leaping in to take charge.

I doubt that anyone will call either of these readings all *that* much into question. The following possibility, however, is still open to rather a lot of argument:

Because I am still more than half convinced that the first known major action that Severus Snape took on behalf of Albus Dumbledore was to report the first half, and **ONLY** the first half of the Trelawney Prophecy to Lord Voldemort. There are just too many internal and external contradictions in DHs for me to buy the claim that what we got in that book was what Rowling had always intended to give us.

At the very least, let me repeat; Dumbledore knew the prophecy was overheard, knew who overheard it; he and Aberforth had the youngster in their custody, and they let him go without Obliviating the information from him, despite the fact that Albus knows that Ministry policy regarding Prophecies is to suppress them.

And also in spite of the fact that we had already seen Albus permit an inconvenient witness to be Obliviating in his own office to keep sensitive information from getting out. Marietta Edgecombe could have contradicted his cover-up, and he was not about to permit that.



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Plus, he knows perfectly well who this particular witness is and who his associates had been during his years in Hogwarts. *And* their probable affiliations.

In short: at the very least, he deliberately allowed knowledge of that Prophecy to escape.



For that matter, I think we can absolutely take that reading as a given. Because Albus then went out of his way to be sure that Tom got word of that Prophecy's *existence*.

Even if that unprepossessing youngster listening at the door wasn't one of Tom's own. I gather that the very next morning Albus waltzed into the Ministry, like a "good citizen" and oh-so-virtuously handed them a record of that Prophecy.

Probably with a highly provocative label on it, too. Something on the order of: "Concerning the Fall of the Dark Lord."

Oh, Albus may not have known about Tom's man Rookwood in the DoM, but he knew the probability that a bonafide Prophecy record labeled something like "The Fall of the Dark Lord" would have set *somebody* talking about it. Even if they didn't know what was actually in it. That much information was bound to leak.

I rather think it was *designed* to leak.

And no, we'll never know what, precisely, the original label said, that label was replaced in 1981 after the DoM had convinced itself that the Prophecy had come to pass. But it definitely was identified as having to do with the Dark Lord, and almost certainly with his eventual downfall.

Albus knew, all right. He didn't just let it *escape*. He *deliberately* put that Prophecy into circulation.



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(Many years after the fact, one now wonders why Tom didn't simply Polyjuice himself as Rookwood, who worked there, and walk straight in to retrieve it.)



Dumbledore was offered a gaudy temptation by the Prophecy demons for the possibility of an "easy fix" to the problem of the former Tom Riddle. And even though he knew that Prophecies are a snare and a delusion, he'd been sitting in the middle of this conflict with Riddle for over 20 years and the whole situation has only gotten progressively worse. I think he took the bait in hopes of soon having it all over.

He must have thought that it would spook Riddle into doing something silly, so they could take him down quickly.

He should have known better than that. If you mess with them, Prophecies usually play out, but *never* the way you expect them to.

In short; he did the easy thing instead of the *right* thing, which would have been to make sure Snape forgot what he heard, ignore the bloody Prophecy, and hunt out the damned Horcruxes himself. Or form an Order to do that without any stupid "Chosen One" booga-booga to confuse the issue.

Admittedly, he may not have *intended* to create a "chosen one" by turning loose that Prophecy. He probably thought he already *had* one.

Or *was* one.

But, even if he hadn't ever studied Divination, he had to know that those were the risks.

And he took them anyway, thinking he was clever enough to



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turn it to his purpose.

And he soon found out just how wrong he was.

And by then it was too late.



And, since I am still rejecting DHs, let us now all step back to the days of HBP when the character of Albus Dumbledore had not yet been deconstructed for us and we could still interpret him as being well-intentioned, even when wrong.

To have deliberately attempted to create a “Chosen One” from an innocent child is a pragmatic, cold-blooded, and most “unworthy” decision. That’s the kind of decision that you would expect from someone like Bartemius Crouch Sr or Rufus Scrimgeour. Not from the Albus Dumbledore we thought we knew.

And it’s the kind of cold-blooded decision that would have needed a far more cold-blooded follow-through than he gave it. HBP-era Dumbledore was a painfully detached character, but he wasn’t altogether cold-blooded. He didn’t truly understand other people’s feelings, but he had a streak of sentimentality a yard wide, himself. I don’t think he was just cynically preaching to the masses. (Unlike Riddle.)

A Crouch or a Scrimgeour *would* have deliberately created a Chosen One, regarded the brat as a tool, and begun training him — *actually* training him — as soon as he was old enough to be trained and thrown him at the enemy at the first tactically good opportunity.

That’s not Albus’s style. He didn’t necessarily intend to bring a child into the equation. It was Tom who did that. And then Albus compounded the error by getting **attached** to the child.



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Harry completely won Albus’s heart by blundering into the Labyrinth to try to save the Stone from Voldemort.

The big bombshell at the end of OotP is that Albus had to finally admit that he makes emotional mistakes. And turning loose that Prophecy looks hell of a lot like a major one. That wasn’t “his” kind of a decision at all, and he succumbed to it in a moment of weakness.

And he trapped himself by it every bit as surely as he trapped Riddle. And, for that matter, Harry. And knows it.



The fact is; you do not *need* a “super-special mystic hero” to solve the problem of a handful of Horcruxes. You need a handful of trusted volunteers who you have taken into your confidence. Volunteers who realize that they may be on a suicide mission and are willing to take the risk.

In fact — and stepping outside my own theory here; the fact that every single bloody one of the Horcruxes was disarmed by a different person *proves* that the Potterverse never needed a “chosen one” to do it. Or not until Tom put the Harrycrux into play. And that was *Albus’s* fault.

Albus was able to disarm one of the accursed things, himself. He might have fared better if he hadn’t tried to disarm it alone. Someone else might have been capable of doing the same thing, particularly under his direction. And he wouldn’t have lacked for volunteers. Even wet-behind-the-ears Regulus Black would have been willing to have a go at it, and he was batting for the other team!

Albus didn’t need a Harry Potter. He needed to have a bit more confidence in the allies he already had. And he was



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handed 10 years that he might have spent rooting the damned things out while Harry was off at the Dursleys. He had to have known that there was at least *one* of the bloody things out there, or he wouldn't have been claiming that Voldemort wasn't really gone. And he didn't do it. Or anything *like* it.

Having had all of his eggs put into one basket by Tom, he felt he was committed to protecting his investment in Harry Potter, and *only* to protecting his investment in Harry Potter. Which he did to the exclusion of trying to do an end run around Riddle while Riddle was distracted. Or even to try find and neutralize the bloody Horcruxes while Riddle was out of commission.

The original gamble eventually paid off, but the change in direction seems to have thrown Albus into a quandary, and his follow-through was completely lame. Albus was not performing up to his usual standard. Or maybe the problem was that Albus was performing *down* to his usual standard. For a more profoundly self-deluded and inefficient old codger you could not have asked for. I don't know if Albus finally even realized that his whole plan was based upon the reading that the Prophecy had ultimately promised that Harry Potter would solve the problem of Tom Riddle, and blindly taking it on faith.

And the Prophecy was a complete and utter lie.

And the cost was astronomically high. If Albus hadn't been so bound and determined to wrap his whole plan in a cloak of secrecy, and to work independent of everyone else, the fall of the Ministry could have probably been avoided.



Still, every reading over the whole story arc, even as pre-



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sented in DHs — with the single exception of the meeting on the windy hilltop in the chapter of 'The Prince's Tale' — immediately reads a whole lot more smoothly once you start reasoning from the standpoint that Snape was already Dumbledore's agent by the time the Prophecy entered the fray, and that he had knowingly passed the partial Prophecy to Tom at Albus's direction rather than as Albus's unwitting tool. Even Albus comes across looking better under this interpretation. Despite the fact that we cannot determine any known actions on Snape's part which were clearly on Dumbledore's behalf before that date.

(Is Rowling aware that her rendition of that scene on the windy hilltop now depicts an Albus who is willing to sit the whole war out and do **nothing** against Tom, until Snape begged him to intervene on Lily's behalf? He certainly never tells Snape that he is *already* trying to protect the Potters. Who were, y'know, members of his own *Order*?)



From this starting point, the remorse/forgiveness scenario which Snape and Dumbledore cooked up together to claim took place at the time of Snape's date of hire at Hogwarts would be a fabrication. It's a cover story that they both held by.

And this is the version of the story that Voldemort was told as well. Consequently, you would never have got any of the three of them to admit to anything else.

I am beginning to think that the whole "Snape-the-Snoop" component of the story may be an equally mendacious tale. Another one that they both held by and that Aberforth would back them up on. That possibility is explored in the essay;



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“‘Loyaulte Me Lie.’”

Another “likely story” is the claim that Snape was looking for a job at the time the Prophecy was made. This may have been an early cover story’s excuse for why Snape had claimed he was there in the first place, or it may be a figment of Trelawney’s imagination. Such a fabrication may have also planted the idea that Voldemort *ought* to send Snape to spy on Dumbledore inside Hogwarts, later (I now think that spying on Dumbledore was the least of Voldemort’s intentions when he finally sent Snape into Hogwarts). Dumbledore “knew” Snape was supposedly looking for a job, because the barman who threw Snape out “would have told him so.”

By 1981, Voldemort probably thought that Dumbledore *might* not yet realize that Snape was a Death Eater who had reported what he heard, but he knew that he couldn’t count on it. In fact it was probably Voldemort who suggested that Snape play the remorse card as a double-bluff when he went to get himself hired at the school, just in case the barman’s report had made Dumbledore suspicious.

Voldemort, after all, knew Dumbledore’s apparent weaknesses almost as well as Dumbledore knew Tom Riddle’s real ones.



Our information regarding the Prophecy, however, comes to us many years afterward, and from someone for whom the matter had been already considered, reconsidered and examined in light of subsequent events. Very distressing subsequent events.

There must have been a point at which Albus suddenly realized that Tom might leap to the conclusion that the Prophecy



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referred to a child.

This was probably not long after he had turned it loose. Albus was allegedly a very clever man, after all. And he is not usually so impulsive as to turn something like that loose the same night it takes place.

Which he must have done, in order for the story to hold up to any investigation of just when Snape had been publicly thrown out of the tavern.

Like many others, I originally thought that it was Dumbledore’s search for the possible parents of that unfortunate child which brought the Longbottoms, the Potters — and their closest friends — into the Order of the Phoenix.

For that matter I thought that was probably the reason he founded the Order of the Phoenix in the first place. Because there certainly isn’t any other convincing reason for why the local High School principal should have his own private intelligence unit, or a vigilante force which is separate from the legitimate government. In which he already played a major role.

At the time the Prophecy was made, there may have been any number of families with members that belonged to groups that had “defied” the Dark Lord, or who had escaped the “attentions” of Voldemort, and some of them may have been expecting children. Given how small wizarding population of Britain is, however, it is not improbable that it had all boiled down to either the Potters’ or the Longbottoms’ child from the beginning.

Although perhaps one needs to remember that more than one of the other members of the original Order was murdered “with his family.” In fact, Tom seems to have made quite a habit of wiping out Order families.



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From this point, however, just about everyone's behavior becomes positively inexplicable. The whole backstory succumbs to a raging case of idiot plot syndrome. And the information in DHs only compounds it.



For, no. Not only is the entire wizarding world apparently expected to hunker down and endure the war for another couple of decades until the "child foretold" grows up to settle the problem for them, but the families who have given birth to the two most likely candidates for being this child are turned loose to raise these highly significant children out in the open where anyone can get at them.

Right up to the point that Voldemort all but sends everyone a letter of intent before anybody, particularly Dumbledore, does anything about it!

Honestly. On the surface of it that's fecklessness on a level that you would expect from Hagrid!

And which, on anything but idiot planet, would be a strong indication that something *else* was going on, or that by this point Albus really was desperately acting out of character, trying his very best to be a cold-blooded, pragmatic war leader, in hopes of creating a Chosen One who would grow up to solve their problem, since they hadn't been able to tempt Tom do something foolish enough to catch him at, before the child was born.

One once was inclined to expect better of Albus. And, indeed, Albus may have *still* been convinced that the Prophecy *really* referred to either himself, Aberforth, or Snape.

So, in that case, protecting the children was a separate



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responsibility. One that he was perfectly willing to delegate to other people.

And he was certainly acting in character by not telling people what the Order's underlying purpose was even about. There is no evidence anywhere in canon that anyone in the original Order of the Phoenix (apart from possibly Aberforth) was aware that a Prophecy had even been made. In fact, in HBP Albus *specifically* denies anyone's having known its content. Or, at least, its *full* content.

Although by OotP the Order must have been filled in enough to know that they were standing guard on a Prophecy *record*.



But, then, maybe we should all try to cut the old man some slack.

Everything that has ever been observed regarding Prophecies strongly suggests that the best thing you can do when one of the pestiferous things occurs is to suppress the information and make every effort to forget it. The *LAST* thing it is safe to do is to set up any extraordinary situation, or to take any desperate measure designed to direct or avert the outcome. That, after all, was Voldemort's mistake.

Clearly Dumbledore, like his author, was misguided enough to try to have it both ways. He turned a *part* of the damned thing loose, but then he chose to try to follow his own standard procedure by doing the very *least* he could get away with in addressing the issue of wrangling with a Prophecy that had managed to escape.

However, he couldn't quite get away with doing absolutely *nothing*.



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And he did found the Order of the Phoenix.



Although by this time, and upon further consideration, it really *does* begin to seem possible that the Order of the Phoenix may have already existed by the time the Prophecy was made. And, yes, Albus is still attributed with having founded it.

Founded it, and then sat back and turned it loose.

Under the direction and guidance of Alastor Moody.

Dumbledore is widely agreed to have founded it. He didn't necessarily actually *run* it. Although, obviously, if he felt he had a good and sufficient reason to call a meeting, such a meeting would certainly take place.

But I think the Order was actually Alastor's baby. Albus already had a day job. Indeed, several of them.

But he might still have encouraged various people to join it. With the very best of intentions.

Which made them all more attractive targets than they might have been otherwise.



Forget whatever Rowling has to say on the subject of the Order. She'd supposedly been working on this series for something like 17 years, and she still hadn't ever come up with a viable explanation for why Albus, with a 24/7 day job for 10 months of the year up in Scotland, should have had his own little elite Order at all, yet. (She couldn't even keep track of what her major supporting characters were doing between the final battle and the epilogue for two days running.)



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It is at least still marginally believable to propose that the original Order of the Phoenix was formed by Dumbledore, as a direct response to his hearing that Prophecy, and that the core membership was composed of all of the people he could find who were known to have "defied" the Dark Lord. Kind of like a survivors' support group.

But it would also be even easier to believe that after listening to Alastor grouching about obstructionism in the Ministry one time too many, he offered to set something up and see if Alastor could put his money where his mouth was.

And that could have been years earlier. Tom had been making a public nuisance of himself since the mid-'60s, after all.

Not that either of them formed the Order all out of nothing. I think Albus already had an informal group of confederates who had been "defying" the Dark Lord for yonks. He could have been collecting them ever since Tom first returned to the ww. Or longer. They were part of his own standard information network. But I don't think it was ever a formal "Order," or that it had ever engaged in general recruiting. Or not until Alastor started grouching about his employers once too often.



But once Albus realized that Tom would probably go looking for a child; that he couldn't count on Tom concentrating on *him*, he felt he had to do *something*. So he started looking for unfiliated people who were known to have messed with the DEs, and invited them into his little organization, along with whatever friends and family members were willing to get involved, so they could be watched over, and then gave it a fancy name.



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After all, *he* had endangered these people and their families more than they had been already by his own action in putting out the word of the existence of this Prophecy, he needed to do *something* towards helping them protect themselves.

Besides, he also desperately needed to know who Tom might conclude the foretold child was.

And I don't think that he was limiting it to people who had messed with DEs any requisite three times, by then. Even once was quite enough. I doubt that Moody and the Longbottoms were the only Aurors in the group. Or the only Ministry employees, either. And, given the situation between Sirius Black and his family, and the fact that he and James Potter were practically joined at the hip, makes it a no-brainer to conclude that *that* precious pair had managed to interfere with DEs at some point between leaving school in '78 and say, late '79 or early '80. Or, possibly, before.

Given the typical opacity of bafflegab, it isn't absolutely certain whether the parents of the foretold child had to "defy" the Dark Lord three times by the time the Prophecy was made, or before the child was born, or merely that they had to defy the Dark Lord three times, period.

Or be a part of a *group* who had defied him three times. But working from the premise that the defiance would have preceded the Prophecy, it would have at least given Dumbledore somewhere to start looking. I contend that the core group of the original Order was made up of all his own former associates and all the new people that Dumbledore could locate who were known to have actively messed with the DEs by the time the



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Prophecy was made.

But if I am right about the timing of the matter, what the Prophecy actually *did* was to goose Albus into giving the Prophecy a whole new pool of potential candidates! And Tom a nice, big, easily visible target. Who had, collectively, already messed with his plans at least three times.

Albus cannot have been happy about that little bit of irony, either. Although I suspect he couldn't really see any way to *not* do it.



I mean, it's not like we've ever really seen the Order of the Phoenix perform any unique function have we? In OotP it had one, since it was trying to do something that the Ministry wouldn't admit needed doing. But back in the day it had just been duplicating the Ministry's efforts while its Founder was stuck off at Hogwarts and unable to give it much time, or to actually use it for anything. What was the point of it? It's a resistance group that cannot find what they are trying to resist. And it doesn't seem to have been around over the whole course of the first war.

Well, Mad-Eye Moody virtually comes right out and tells us that much, doesn't he? That vintage photograph was of the "original" Order. And the Potters and the Longbottoms were already a part of it.

In that photograph, which would seem to have been taken very early in the Order's history, no infants were in sight, and Harry certainly noticed no indications of any pregnancies. Ergo: the photograph had to have been taken either at some point after Harry and Neville were born, and they were off asleep in a cot somewhere out of the picture, or it was taken between June '78



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when the Marauders and Lily finished school, and say maybe 5–6 months or so before Harry and Neville's births in mid-'80. If the Prophecy was made between Halloween '79 and the beginning of January '80, and the Order formed over the next month, neither pregnancy would be "showing" yet at the Order's founding.

If that Prophecy had been properly squelched according to Ministry regulations I think there very well might BE no Order of the Phoenix. Or at least not by any such official *name*.

And the issue would still be wide open, because the damned things sometimes manage to play out even when no one takes the bait. Although in this case it is hard to see any way in which one could make it play out without Tom's active cooperation. And he wouldn't give them that without knowing about it.

Since we also have to factor in the time that James and whoever else was messing with the DEs three times, that could push the plausible start date a bit later, but by no very great amount. The Marauders had only had since June of '78 to be out in public getting in the DEs way, after all..

Unless they were doing it while they were still in school, and during term breaks.

And if this is the *original* Order, then the Order itself was quite a late development during the final years of Voldemort's first rise. For it couldn't have been founded much before the Potters were out of school if they were original members. The Trelawney Prophecy would make a convenient hook for a wide-ranging change in plans on both sides of the conflict, and the founding of an Order dedicated to opposing Voldemort certainly fits the profile.

Particularly if Voldemort had suddenly stepped up his agenda and was being even more active than before.

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And we don't know of any other such event that would fit the bill.



But I am most inclined to read the situation as that it was only after Dumbledore had founded his Order, and a couple of months later was told that two of the families in it were each expecting a baby at the end of July, that he finally drew a straight line between two points and concluded that Tom would be sure to decide that the "7th month" of the Prophecy referred to July and not, as one might have reasonably expected, to September. Or, if the Prophecy had been made at Halloween, to the end of May.

This was information that Voldemort did not have ready access to, and that he probably was deliberately kept from having access to. Which may contribute to the fact that it took Voldemort more than a year to get onto the same page over who the apparent child of prophecy was. He may have been expecting the child to be born at the end of September (or May). And when no child meeting the criterion was, had to start looking elsewhere.

And it took some time for him to get onto the right page, since this was something that he would have had to investigate alone. He would not have wanted his followers to know that a Prophecy existed which related to his downfall. Indeed the only follower who unquestionably knew of the existence of the Prophecy was Severus Snape. And he claimed not to know all of it.

For that matter, if we toss that windy hilltop encounter from consideration (and since it was yet another lame insertion which makes no sense in any rational timeline, I find I can

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do so fairly easily) it plays very well to suspect that one of the reasons he finally sent Snape into Hogwarts at all was because Snape *did* know about the Prophecy, and the first order Snape was given was to get a look at the enrollment list and copy out the names of all the children born in the year after the Prophecy was made, so Tom would know for certain that he hadn't missed any. And Snape couldn't very well get out of doing it.

You would think that he might have left off the Potters' name — but perhaps he didn't dare to do that for fear of it being found out and his cover blown.

Which pushed Albus into an even more untenable position for having turned the damned thing loose in the first place.



And while we are on the issue of Dumbledore and the Order: Isn't it about time we stopped and seriously asked ourselves; "What did you do in the War, Albus?" and applied a industrial strength reality check to the answer.

Fifty million fans CAN be wrong, you know. Easily.

From the day that "Lord Voldemort" raised his ugly head, (which is now revealed to have been all the way back around some time before JFK was shot) Albus Dumbledore's primary occupation was as the Headmaster of a School.

His primary duties were to the School. Not, except in an advisory manner, to the war effort. It was years before most people in the WW had even realized they needed a war effort. And nobody ever suggested closing the school because there was a war on.

As Headmaster, Dumbledore's duties insofar as the war



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went were to keep the children entrusted to his care safe. To keep them informed of what was happening outside the School property. To convince them that there was a danger abroad in the Wizarding World. To teach them to defend themselves — and to not run silly risks. To try to make them understand why the Dark Lord's agenda was a Bad Thing. To let them know what the Ministry was doing to protect them. And to lose as few as possible to the other side.

He was NOT actively engaged in the "war effort," such as it was. Not in any official, Ministry-authorized capacity. He already had a day job, thank you very much. A very demanding one. And if he was already Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot by that time as well (he may not have been, although he did have a seat in that body), the Ministry, in a very real sense, would have worked for him. Not the other way around. And he mostly left them alone to get on with it.

I also think it fairly self-evident that he and his brother Aberforth, at the Hog's Head had been engaged in collecting and processing whatever information they could regarding the Death Eaters, and relaying what seemed appropriate to the Ministry from day one. But that was not his primary, day-to-day job.

By all indications, Dumbledore was out on the periphery of the actual "war" (which wasn't at all what we would call a war, it certainly wasn't *military*). He would have been convening the Wizengamot, consulted by the Ministry, quoted in the Prophet, possibly passing along any useful information or insights that he might have come across, but he was not out leading troops and he was not out fighting battles.

Unless the battle came to Hogwarts itself. And, realistically,



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what are the odds?

Despite the eternal determination of the young to consider themselves the center of the universe, Lord Voldemort wasn't drawing in his hand-picked followers and ultimately anointing himself the rising Dark Lord solely in order to take over a Castle full of teenagers who represented perhaps 15% of the population, even if he did have a personal attachment to the place. If he really feared Dumbledore, it would have been a simple enough matter to keep Dumbledore's actions monitored and to leave him strictly alone.

And I am not convinced yet that the reason Tom feared Dumbledore wasn't more because of what Dumbledore knew about Tom Riddle, than anything to do with his politics, his philosophy, or even his power as a wizard.

Until Sybill Trelawney single-handedly upped the ante by spouting a Prophecy in Albus Dumbledore's presence.

And that of an eavesdropping Severus Snape.

Oh, yes, and Aberforth, the barman.

Maybe.



And in the Final Reckoning...

In the end, thanks to James Potter's lack of cooperation over the matter of a Secret Keeper, it all went pear-shaped and Albus was left with a 15-month-old "Child of Prophecy." Of Tom's making.

And there was nothing he could do about it but suck it up and deal with the situation. Which probably wouldn't have existed if he'd either Obliviated Snape, or told him to keep his



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mouth shut.

And what did the whole Prophecy gambit accomplish?

I can tell you right up front what it *didn't* accomplish. It didn't create a super-special mystic hero who was uniquely qualified to settle the ww's Dark Lord problem.

Yes that's right. Harry was neither uniquely qualified to destroy Horcruxes, nor to vanquish Voldemort himself. And, apart from disarming the Diary, he didn't end up actually doing either one. Five other people settled the rest of the Horcruxes, and Tom got tricked into killing himself.

Twice. And if you count the Harrycrux, three times.

All the Prophecy gambit did was to create the Harrycrux.

Which was nothing but an unnecessary complication. The Harrycrux was absolutely *not* a part of the *solution*.

And it never would have existed if Albus had been half as good at walking the walk as he was at talking the talk. So, you tell me; whose side are Prophecies on?



Which, if it was *intentional*, if this was a *deliberate* slap across the readers' faces, would have been just about the only remotely clever thing in DHs, and Rowling managed to subvert the genre after all.

Unfortunately, by this time I haven't enough confidence in Rowling's skills, intentions, or caliber of mind to count upon it having been deliberate, and not merely a case of cutting the ground out from under her own feet.

And, all too soon, Albus was back to his old tricks again, willing to delay matters, and delay matters, and to *keep* delaying



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matters, and to allow Tom to make the next move.



Since OotP, we have had enough information to speculate that it is in fact the Wizengamot which appoints the Minister for Magic. And the Wizengamot is a body of only some 50 prominent wizards and witches, many of whom already hold upper-level Ministry offices.

In short, it is a convocation of “insiders” and Dumbledore has been one of the leaders of this caucus for a long time. As recently as 1990 the most recent proposal (at least the 4th) to make Albus Dumbledore the Minister of Magic was made, and Dumbledore still didn’t want the job. Hogwarts was quite enough responsibility for him, thank you very much. Particularly considering that his protégé, or maybe his project, Harry Potter, was due to arrive at the school in something under a year.

I have always contended that this proposal to make him Minister probably had next to nothing to do with his activities during VoldWar I. And, indeed, he tells us in passing that he was being offered the post even while his erstwhile friend Gellert Grindelwald was rising to power at the other end of Europe. By 1990 he had probably already been effectively ruling British wizardry for nearly thirty years, if not longer.

And it was only after Voldemort’s return in 1995 that the hastily reassembled Order of the Phoenix was repurposed into a “Secret Society” to supposedly keep watch on Voldemort’s suspected activities. I believe that its real objective was to foster a gaudy distraction which purported to be “protecting” the Prophecy record. This pose was a complete red herring spe-



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cifically designed to flush Voldemort out of hiding.

So he could be witnessed, and his return no longer denied by the Ministry.

In short, it was a scam.

And that monumental detour in the Order’s purpose was solely because Dumbledore believed that someone needed to do it and the Ministry wasn’t willing to believe that it was a job that needed to be done. Once that particular complication had been taken care of, the Order could go back to its original function as the Harry Potter escort service and protection agency. And from the glimpses of it that we got in HBP and afterwards, to some extent, it had.

With a difference. Harry Potter was no longer an infant unaware of what is going on around him. And by the end of his 6th year he had been set up with a quest of his own upon which he will not be likely to lead them. Indeed, the Order had effectively outlived its purpose.

Although it did indeed respond at his (or rather, to Neville’s) call to arms for the final confrontation.



The ongoing contest between Albus Dumbledore and Tom Riddle passed into a new phase at the end of OotP, however. For with his decision to share the content of the full Trelawney Prophecy with Harry while Harry’s mind was still unshielded, Albus may have effectively chosen to share it with Tom Riddle as well. And it is made reasonably evident in the opening chapter of DHs that Riddle is indeed now aware of the full content of the Prophecy, and there is no available 3rd party who could



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have told him about it.

Much of Albus's remorse at the end of Phoenix may be due to the knowledge that had he taken Harry into his confidence on this matter earlier, there is certainly a good chance that Sirius Black would still be alive. But I am not convinced that Albus gave a damn about Sirius Black. (Who probably reminded him way too much of Gellert Grindelwald.)

It is difficult to see just how the knowledge of the full content of the Prophecy could materially further Voldemort's aims, when he had already caused the relevant portions of it to engage by his own actions more than a decade earlier. But when you think of all the resources expended by both sides over a piece of information that could make no significant difference to either one, it all seems an appalling waste.

Which is what forces me to the conclusion that the whole business over the Prophecy record in book five was indeed no more than a snare and a delusion designed to draw Voldemort into the Department of Mysteries where he could be witnessed by a large number of people at once and his return no longer denied. It was another piece of orchestrated misdirection on the part of Dumbledore and his followers *à la* the Philosopher's Stone in PS/SS. In fact it was practically the very *same* orchestrated misdirection. I'm surprised that Voldemort was insecure enough to be deceived by the same ploy a second time.

The scam served two purposes. First; to distract Voldemort from planning and executing any more effective actions toward rebuilding his own neglected organization, and, second; by keeping a look-out for Voldemort's agents and deflecting them, in order to make it necessary for him to show up himself.

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After all, given the protective enchantments which the Ministry routinely places on Prophecy records, there was no need for anyone to "protect" it further. In fact, it might have been worthwhile to leave it completely unguarded and see how just many followers Voldemort would lose to the inevitable ensuing magically-induced dementia before he caught on and realized that just sending in redshirts to retrieve it was doing his organization more harm than good.

No, I think the round the clock guards that Dumbledore had posted were there to raise the alarm and call in the witnesses when Voldemort finally showed up.

Or, they *should* have been. Which makes you worry a bit about what happened to Dumbledore's guards by the time Harry and his friends barged in. There were no Order guards on the scene by then, and they clearly had not had a chance to send an alarm out, since it was Snape who ended up relaying the alert from Hogwarts.

And the DoM was harboring close to a dozen Death Eaters that night, with official Ministry wonks like McNair to give them access.

Sturgis Podmore landed in Azkaban from his stint at sentry duty, and Arthur Weasley was bitten by a snake. Who was on duty the night Harry made his raid? And what became of them?

Or had Albus and Company already moved on to Plan B?



By now I am about 85–90% certain that, despite Rowling's apparent decision to suddenly soft-pedal and scale back the whole issue of the mental connection between Harry and

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Voldemort in HBP, after making such a big honking deal of it in OotP; if that connection between Harry and Voldemort really did go both ways, then Voldemort was almost certainly in Harry's head throughout most of the Lost Prophecy chapter. After all, that's exactly what Tom Riddle *would* have done.

And Dumbledore may very well have suspected as much because the version of the circumstances under which he heard the Prophecy that he told Harry was absolutely NOT the way that it had to have actually taken place. That was the "official version" which had *already* been leaked to Voldemort.

It was also calculated to conceal Dumbledore's knowledge of Snape's participation in the matter. And the manner in which he presented the information was further calculated to conceal everything but the bare wording of the Prophecy itself. He not only did not tell Harry "everything," as he claimed in OotP, he told him the very least he could get away with.

I pointed out at an earlier point in this article that at that point in the series, Dumbledore seldom flat-out lied in our hearing. But I think he may have had compelling reason to do so when it came time to fill Harry in on the full text of that Prophecy. It was absolutely essential for Voldemort NOT to learn that Snape may have been in a position to hear the whole thing. Even if he didn't, in fact, do so.

Consider: Riddle had already figured out that if he could suppress his own emotions he could waltz in and out of Potter's head almost at will. He'd been doing it at least throughout the past two school terms, and probably longer. Dumbledore claims that he had seen a shadow of Riddle looking out through Harry's eyes off and on throughout the year (this might not be



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too difficult since Tom has red eyes these days), and this was while Albus was deliberately *avoiding* Harry.

I suspected this is another piece of information that Dumbledore shared with Snape, so Snape could take the necessary protective measures when trying to teach the boy Occlumency, which may explain exactly why Snape was off-loading certain memories to an external storage device before the Occlumency lessons commenced. It wasn't to keep the memories stored there from Harry, it was to keep them from Voldemort.

Or that Snape was *implying* to Voldemort — in case he was present — that he was protecting sensitive information from Potter. (He still didn't need to make such a performance of it. And there is no telling whether the memories he was usually off-loading were the same ones that he later left out for Harry to find. The essay entitled 'The Pensieve Gambit' explores this issue in more detail.)

At the opening of the Lost Prophecy chapter, Voldemort had just suffered a major setback.

His long-planned gambit of luring Potter to the Department of Mysteries where he could be intercepted by the DEs and the Prophecy record recovered has been routed. His secret return is publicly outed. Half of the Azkaban escapees have been disabled and recaptured. He has also now lost Malfoy, Nott (who, was injured in the fracas) Crabbe, Avery, and McNair and most of their resources are now going to be more difficult to access. The Prophecy record is destroyed. And Potter has escaped him *again*. He also ran into something *totally* unexpected when he tried to take possession of the boy. He barely made it out of the Ministry himself, and with only one of his followers.



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The mission was a shambles. He has lost eleven of his followers (20-25% of his manpower, which is a significant loss) at least two of those losses are ones positioned highly enough that he will be hard put to replace them. And he has just come off the worst in a duel with Albus Dumbledore. He only just got out before the Ministry forces closed in and captured him. And he has failed to kill Potter for the 4th time. (I'm not sure if he was aware of the Diary Revenant's attempt to do so.)

And yet he knows that he can still get into Potter's head without the kid being aware of him, and Potter is bound to be given *some* sort of debriefing by Albus Dumbledore — and fairly soon, too. To that point in the series, Voldemort consistently displayed at least a 90% accuracy rating at anticipating his opponents' actions. He had also had a long time to observe Dumbledore's characteristic methods.

Potter is still a largely unknown factor. But Riddle knows Dumbledore, and knows the old hypocrite pretty well. He can expect with some degree of confidence that Dumbledore will give the boy some kind of an explanation. Soon.



Well, what would you do if *you* were Voldemort?

You know there is going to be a debriefing session between your enemies in which information will be exchanged. You know that you can successfully (and literally) "infiltrate" the enemy. In his position what would you have done? The conclusion is practically a no-brainer.

Keep in mind that the information that Rowling always gave us in interviews was calibrated to not reveal anything that



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would take place in the upcoming books. And it was sometimes deliberately oversimplified and misleading through being based on only what the characters knew at a given point in the series. (And sometimes she either flat-out lied, or changed her mind and did something else entirely.)

In Tom's place wouldn't you immediately tell Bellatrix that you are NOT to be disturbed, and reestablish contact with Harry's mind? That monumental rage that Harry went into as soon as Dumbledore truthfully, but unwisely claimed to know how he was feeling, would have drawn him like a beacon. And his own fury probably contributed to it as well.

For that matter Voldemort probably made it to the meeting place before Albus did. In support of that possibility, I cite that sudden surge of anger that "came out of nowhere" while Harry was waiting in Dumbledore's office for Dumbledore to return. Up to that point Harry is wallowing in grief and guilt at the realization that he had been wrong, wrong, *wrong*, and that Sirius's death was largely his fault. (Albus really *did* understand how Harry felt about *that*, you know.) Suddenly in the middle of this, a wave of anger overtakes him and sets the tone of his responses for the whole first part of the interview until Dumbledore manages to distract him with information about — surprise, surprise — the *Prophecy*.

Now, Harry's own anger was probably there just below the surface. Anger is one of the classic stages in a grief cycle. But I expect that it got some sudden reinforcement from outside which brought it forward prematurely.

We were always expected to believe that Harry is sharp enough to understand a good deal of his own part in that deba-



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cle, and I think that if he had been left alone he would have been in the grief and guilt stage for some while longer. Once he had been prematurely pushed into the anger stage, he was barely able to contain himself for much of the rest of the interview. I propose that this may have been because he was having to juggle not only his own anger, but Voldemort's as well.

I also suspect that discovering the full content of the Prophecy hasn't told Voldemort much that he hadn't deduced already.

Canon Voldemort was originally set up as once being "brilliant," after all.

I agree he doesn't act it (particularly not in DHs. Nobody is brilliant there), but Rowling is really not that sound a writer. She was still on her first story, and it's shown major signs of having got away from her. And I suspect that the fact that the story was being marketed to children may have led her into the pitfall of oversimplifying elements that are not simple.

And of trying to complicate things that are, just to attempt to seem clever.

The portion of the Prophecy that Voldemort already knew makes it clear that there is allegedly an "anointed one" who has the power to "vanquish" him. That already gave him, a pretty strong hint that he was probably dealing with an either/or situation, and always had been.

The only new piece of solid information that he got out of Dumbledore's replay from the Pensieve was that he, himself, was the one who "marked" Harry as his equal. The rest was, to him, a lot of nebulous booga-booga about "power the Dark Lord knows not," which he, assuming that this is just Albus's old Power of Love™ codswallop again, summarily dismissed, and

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an even stronger confirmation that, yup, it's an either/or situation all right, with the added tidbit that neither of them would be able to have a "proper" life until the either/or was resolved.

None of which would have mattered a hill of beans against Voldemort's overall plans anyway. He had *always* intended to kill Harry Potter.

The full content of the Prophecy didn't change that in the least. It only added the carrot to the stick. Now, once he kills Potter, he will not only remove the one who can "vanquish" him, he will gain the means to "truly live" as well. (Eternity *and* a pair of skates! Woo-hoo!) Which, as I've stated in the original Changeling hypothesis (now to be found in the 7th Son collection as; 'Redeeming the Potterverse'), almost certainly means something other than the way Tom interpreted it.

Particularly given that it didn't actually work out that way At All. And once he'd got what he wanted he skipped out, leaving Harry and Dumbledore to conclude their discussion in peace.

Small wonder that Albus "rather expected" that Tom would have closed off the connection from his end. He'd got what he'd come for.



If nothing else is clear. It seems plain to me that the Trelawney Prophecy was always the equivalent of a rogue bludger on the pitch and we would be stuck having to dodge it right up to the final showdown in Book 7. And I think we can take it for granted that by the end of OotP the former Tom Riddle knew every word of it.

And much good it did him.

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Particularly since the bafflegab reversed the terms on everyone. It wasn't that neither could *live* while the other survived. It was that neither of them could *die* so long as both survived — in Harry.

And, as Albus, sadder but wiser, pointed out to Harry, once he finished giving him the official Riddle backstory in HBP, it's all a load of old pants anyway. Prophecies are usually no more than what you chose to make of them.

And even the “real” ones aren't actually True!

And he was absolutely right about that. But I think even Albus managed to miss the point.

For all that the Power of Love™ that Albus was so convinced was the answer to this particular Riddle, and for all that he was so willing to ascribe that power to Harry, even at the end of the series, we still haven't really seen a lot of *evidence* of it, have we?

Certainly no more than we've seen in Malfoy, desperately trying to save his family. Or in Neville to defend his. Or the Weasleys. Or Fleur. Or Tonks. The “power” of basic human attachment just isn't all that thin on the ground, is it?

In, fact, Harry seems to share this particular quality with everyone else in the entire Potterverse *except* Lord Voldemort.

And we don't even know for certain that the power of human attachment is even “the power” that the Prophecy refers to (ETA: it's not!); however much Albus seems to be convinced that this is the case. *I* am not at all convinced that this is the case. (And I was right.)

I was willing to accept that it *could* be. (But it sure didn't look like it as it played out.)



The Child Foretold

But even if it had been; in amongst all of the portentous twaddle and claptrap that we'd been handed in that fool Prophecy; for all of that precious booga-booga over; “*The one with the power...*”; “*But he shall have power the Dark Lord knows not.*” it never quite manages to come right out and tell us that — for all that Harry may be the one that the Dark Lord marked as his equal — that Harry is the **ONLY** one with “the power” to vanquish the Dark Lord, does it?

No. It doesn't.

And, in the end, Harry didn't even **DO** it.

Our Tom managed to vanquish *himself*.

And Tom didn't even *have* that particular “power.”



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Anyone who attempts to analyze anything that has been claimed to have happened in the period leading up to the opening of the Harry Potter series is aware that we have a number of gaping holes in the middle of the backstory. By this point, I honestly do not think that Rowling has ever had the slightest idea of how a Horcrux is actually made, doesn't care, and probably doesn't even want to think about the subject, either.

In which case she probably ought not to have been building them into the foundation of her story.

And they DO constitute the foundation of the story.

So, yes, they *matter*. Really. And it's not like it's rocket science to try to figure out something that works within the parameters that we're given in the text.



Mind you, where unsavory magical constructs are concerned I do think that Rowling probably did turn up something suitably disgusting in regards to how one creates a homunculus such as that which was used to get VaporMort back onto the physical plane.

Rowling waved the existence of that particular process, and how revolting it is, in our faces when an interviewer actually got up the nerve to ask about how Tom built his Horcruxes. *Without* ever answering the question which had been asked. Indeed, implying that we didn't want to know. (Sorry Jo, we definitely *did* want to know about Horcruxes. We aren't anything like as interested in the homunculus.)

Whatever else it might have been, the homunculus wasn't a Horcrux. Human beings have been attempting to perform



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magic for a long time, and some of the historically documented attempts are gross enough to gag a maggot. So something suitably disgusting was probably out there for Rowling to latch onto.

However, I suspect that since Horcruxes (by whatever name) — unlike homunculi — are a folklore element, rather than something documented in actual historical attempts to perform magic, she didn't really have anything solid to extrapolate from, and it simply never occurred to her that she would need to create something plausible. Voldemort did it, because he did it, because the plot *needed* him to do it. Who cares how?

Well, that's just it. In folklore it *doesn't* matter how the giant got his heart into an egg, just so long as you can find the egg and smash it.

Unfortunately, Rowling seems unclear on the concept that importing folkloric elements into a work of fiction does not result in creating new folklore. An individual author is not capable of creating new folklore. An individual author creates *fiction*. The elements that Rowling was determined to import into her work of fiction were of a class and type to render her work of fiction into a work which will be classified as fantasy, but *fantasy* is not folklore, *either*.

In a fantasy series, it rather *does* matter just how an evil wizard manages to get several bits of his soul into a set of knick-knacks.

Particularly if one of the main tasks of your hero is to get them out.



So, first there are a number of things related to souls which



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we need to keep in mind.

To recap:

It appeared to be established in CoS that at least some wizards are capable of creating something on the order of independently aware and potentially fully-functioning reproductions of their personal “selves”; potentially-incarnate memories. We now know that that particular entity was generated by a fragment of its creator’s soul which had been removed into a Horcrux; and which under certain circumstances *might* have been capable of taking up a second, independent physical existence separate from its original container.

It is strongly suggested in canon that in order for this last to have taken place, two murders would have been required. One to split the soul prior to putting the fragment into the Horcrux, and one to enable the fragment to escape this external housing and reincarnate itself by stealing the life force of a second victim.

Such entities we are given to understand are NOT common, and are not merely very Dark magic, but are an abominable perversion of both magic and nature, in fact, tantamount to blasphemy.

Not altogether unrelated to this; throughout this entire series J.K. Rowling has repeatedly rubbed everybody’s noses in the existence of a poltergeist, an entity believed by paranormal researchers to be generated as a manifestation of the psychic disturbance produced by turbulent human emotions — without ever having existed as an actual, living human being, and consequently, although it must be classified as a spirit, it is not actually a ghost. It is not established that a poltergeist actually possesses an individual soul. Which, upon consideration, seems unlikely.

It was also stated outright in PoA that a wizard’s body will

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not immediately die without a soul. The dysfunctional condition of those who have been administered the Dementor’s Kiss is due to the fact that their souls have allegedly been eaten. And, consequently, no longer exist in the physical world.

Remember these points for possible future reference.



Horace Slughorn is an abject coward and squeamish with it besides, but I do not think that he would have been quite so agitated and dithery over the spell that creates a Horcrux (that’s “spell” singular, not “spells” plural, although I suspect that the creation of a Horcrux is more likely to be a “process” than a single spell) if all said spell was good for was to facilitate a filing procedure. Acto Slughorn, who, although an educated wizard, is hardly an expert on Horcruxes, to create a Horcrux requires only one spell. I doubt that the only thing that spell does is move a pre-existing, already detached soul fragment to an external housing. I suspect that Slughorn’s wittering on and hyperventilating all over the subject was because the “spell” that creates the Horcrux actually enables the whole *process* which results in murdering the Victim *and* splitting off a piece of the caster’s soul.

Rowling, obviously never considered the details of the process important enough to work them out all the way through to a logical conclusion. But that’s no reason for us to be similarly disrespectful.

So, looking at the matter in general: murder — by any means — is believed to split the murderer’s soul. But it doesn’t necessarily break pieces off and scatter them around the landscape. The pieces all stay together, and if sufficient remorse is gener-

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ated the rent might heal. Regardless of the fact that there is no undoing the murder itself.

An AK's purpose is simply to kill it's target. There are any number of perfectly legitimate, socially acceptable reasons why one might need to kill a target. The target doesn't need to be human, either (and in fact it usually isn't). AK isn't even necessarily illegal in itself. It's only illegal when used against another human. You might as well compare knowledge of the AK to owning a rifle.

But I suspect that the Horcrux-creator spell's victim is always human. Or at any rate, is always a sentient Being. In fact that spell probably *requires* that its victim have a soul of their own. It divides the caster's soul, by producing the side effect of the destruction of another person's life, and the release of their victim's soul, as a by-product.

The spell may also make it easier to encase the newly-created separate fragment in its external housing (the Horcrux) as a part of the inherent process, in order to keep the split from ever healing. The soul, as Slughorn tells us is *supposed* to remain intact — or at least to all remain in the same place. To divide it and separate out that fragment of the murderer's soul is "against nature."

There is nothing against nature about killing things. In nature, most creatures kill just in order to eat.

I think that Slughorn was telling the truth, as far as he knows it. So when he says that there is a specific spell used to create a Horcrux, I do not think that he was wrong. Although his account of how it works may be inaccurate, or at the very least, incomplete. He does claim not to know that spell himself, so he



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has clearly never actually studied it.

But whatever the spell is, it would unquestionably be classified as a curse.

And, whatever the spell is, it doesn't really sound as though the victim gets any choice in the matter. I rather suspect that you aren't going to produce a Horcrux from any killing made during a running battle.

Ergo: it might be reasonable to postulate that the victim of a Horcrux-creating murder is no more likely to be capable of doing any curse blocking than, say, a 15-month-old infant.



You do realize that this is beginning to skate around the edges of a definition of "human sacrifice," don't you? Maybe it is *supposed* to.

To repeat: I postulate that this as-yet-unnamed curse is one which makes it possible to separate out a portion of the caster's soul. It *may* actually kill the victim, and it *could* possibly make it possible to capture the now liberated soul fragment into its new housing. If the creation of a Horcrux were *only* a matter of a filing procedure I think even Horace might have known that much, little as he clearly wants to know anything about the creation of Horcruxes. And I still contend that the curse to create a Horcrux is not specifically the AK.

Still, that all seems a little elaborate to be attributable to only one spell. We may need to break the process down into its component parts.

If the if spell to create a Horcrux is also "a" killing curse, it is one that very few people are still aware of. Only those who



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either completed their schooling before the subject was banned at Hogwarts (some point before the early 1940s), those who received their education outside of Britain, or those who have access outside of Hogwarts to Dark Arts reference materials which describe the process, and have a reason to look the subject up. To most wizards in at least the past 3 generations, the term; “killing curse” will bring to mind only the AK. I contend that this is a part of what is obscuring the issue.

Common usage being what it is, even those old enough to know better, or who were educated overseas, will probably not remember the Horcrux-creating curse when a current reference is made to “the” killing curse. And there could be noticeable similarities between the two spells, for their purpose is similar enough for them to share the same root principles. Particularly given that any sort of murder will also damage the soul, even if it does not typically create a Horcrux.

In complete defiance of Rowling’s statements, and *particularly* in defiance of the fake “flashback” at Godric’s Hollow (which is totally crackfic), I *still* don’t believe what Tom threw at Harry would be a standard AK. I don’t think that what Tom threw at Harry was *any* kind of an AK at all. Even if it is Rowling who seems to think it was. (Maybe she just didn’t want to have to stop and hand us yet another infodump in the middle of an action sequence.)

I think Tom tried to murder Harry with the traditional Horcrux-creation curse.



Actually, given that “mad scientist Tom’s” first two Horcruxes



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appear to have been created using two vastly different means of murdering their victim — *neither* of which used any sort of spell *at all* — I would not be surprised to discover that Tom quite deliberately used a different method of killing his victim with *every* Horcrux he ever made. Not excluding the hypothetical use of a rope, a lead pipe, and a candlestick. If such is the case, one of them probably *was* created by using a simple AK.

Which throws a bit of a spanner into the works. Myrtle was clearly killed by looking into the eyes of a Basilisk, and Madam Hepzibah Smith was definitely poisoned. Neither of these are murder methods which require the use of a spell, yet, *act*o JK Rowling, Horcruxes resulted from both of those deaths.

Clearly, Horace Slughorn doesn’t really know what he is talking about. To be sure, there **is** a spell which enables the creation of a Horcrux. One which divides the soul of the caster and may make it possible to trap the fragment in an external housing. And any mention or description of this spell had been purged from the Hogwarts library by the time that young Tom Riddle asked about it in the academic year of 1942–’43.

But I am no longer convinced that the spell which Horace is alluding to specifies the manner in which one is supposed to actually **kill** the victim. Although it may very well recommend one. Indeed, given the sort of overblown melodrama which Rowling’s wizards seem all too likely to indulge in, it may recommend stabbing the victim with an obsidian knife on a stone table during the dark of the moon. Or some other equally fanciful and difficult to orchestrate rigamarole — which very well may have set our Tom off into devising improvisations using the assets he had at hand.



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There probably was a spell which would actually kill a victim in the documentation, however. Or, more likely, references to one, and it was one which, at the age of 16, Tom didn't know. It may have taken him some time to hunt those references down and determine precisely which spell the reference meant. Whatever it was, it probably wouldn't have been a simple AK.

Nor was it an AK which was used for the attempt which was made in Godric's Hollow. The very fact that the whole attempt went so monumentally *wrong*, suggests that whatever spell was used needed to be grounded in some manner, and that it wasn't, produced unforeseen results.

I rather think that for *that* particular Horcrux, Tom, believing that this one would be the last of his grand collection of Horcruxes, tried to do it in the grand traditional manner. And he might not have ever attempted to do it that way before, so he was flying blind.

In any case, whatever it was he was attempting to use, it wasn't likely to be a plain-vanilla AK.



Even dismissing most of the (totally unconvincing) information that was pasted on in DHs, we still are stuck with a number of anomalies to juggle regarding the Avada Kadavra curse.

In the first place, the depiction of the behavior of the AK in canon was already completely inconsistent. We might as well take a survey at those inconsistencies before going further.

It should be noted that in neither Cedric's nor Albus's deaths was any "rushing sound" present — such as the one that Harry was aware of in the death of the spider in Moody's class, or



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in the death-in-a-dream/vision of the murder of Frank Bryce. That both Cedric and Albus's deaths took place out of doors while the spider and Frank Bryce were killed in an enclosed space might have been relevant. But I think it more likely that Rowling was just attempting to pile on her interpretation of "drama" and being carelessly inconsistent.

On the other hand, such a rushing sound was present when Harry was attacked by a dementor in Little Whinging. Which was in the open. That sound was also noted in the memory which was replayed when he was confronted by a dementor on the Hogwarts Express in Year 3. That confrontation was in an enclosed space.

However, there is also no mention of any such sound effects in the rest of his dementor-assisted memories of the attack upon him and his mother when he was a baby. Which is the memory that such encounters consistently invoke. This is particularly odd since the presence of the dementors (at the Quidditch game), or the dementor-surrogate of the Boggart (in Lupin's tutoring sessions), which provoked those memories, ought also to have produced an awareness of the rushing sound, if the sound is also to be associated with the presence of dementors. And it didn't.

At present we have no context which would make it clear whether the rushing sound is a relevant piece of data for our reasoning or just a case of Rowling striking poses to be "interesting," and anything which would contribute to consistency has been simply allowed to fall through the cracks.

Although the fact that there was clearly NO Horcrux created from the death of the spider, should count against the like-



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lihood of Albus's claim that one was created from the murder of Frank Bryce, as well, even though we did not actually hear the incantation used to murder Bryce. I think we should just conclude that Albus managed to get something wrong.

For that matter, even Rowling has since changed her mind *ex-cathedra* regarding the murder of Frank Bryce being used to create the Nagini Horcrux, having now decided to claim that the murder of Bertha Jorkins created it instead. To the best of my understanding, the correction has never been incorporated into the books, however. In canon, bogus as it is, Albus's clanker still stands.

For the record; Rowling's statement that it was Bertha Jorkins's death that created the Nagini Horcrux is far more believable, and I have adopted it in my own theories, although it is still problematic for any sort of compliance with canon.

Assuming that by this point in time anyone still cares about *that*.

Another anomaly we have to juggle is the issue that when *whatever* the spell was that rebounded, allegedly Tom's body was completely destroyed by it. There was no body left at the scene of the attempted murder. The Dark Lord did not merely die, he *disappeared*.

And the wall blew out. As stated elsewhere, AK might damage inanimate objects when it hits them by mistake, but it doesn't typically cause explosions.

And, finally, as is also stated elsewhere in this collection, it needs to be pointed out that there was no record in the *Priori Incantatum* "log" from Tom's wand in *GoF* of *any* curse that failed. The log skipped directly from Bertha Jorkins, to Lily.

With *nothing* in between.



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The whole business of what went on in Godric's Hollow is explored in far more detail in the essay entitled; 'C.S.I.: Godric's Hollow'. I will try not to get too distracted by it here.



But, starting over from the beginning: as to how Lord Voldemort managed to attain deathlessness — even if not true immortality; we already had a clue to this puzzle in Muggle folklore. Specifically, Russian folklore. But the same principle shows up in tales from other lands as well. Even some from Britain.

It was known that the sorcerer, Koschi the Deathless (in common with various other traditional villains from other cultures) could not be killed, because he did not keep his life inside his own body. His life was secured inside an egg, inside a bird, inside a treasure chest, hidden in the trunk of a tree, guarded by a dragon. The precise sequence there may be inexact, but the basic concept should be clear. When the dragon was lulled into sleep, the tree felled, the chest opened, the bird snared, and the egg broken, Koschi the Deathless died.

As I state above, the very fact that we were dealing with a "deathless" evil sorcerer was a clue in itself that we might be very well-advised to check out what traditional sources have to say about such entities. And it does indeed turn out to be an element that Rowling adopted from traditional folklore, as she had in the case of dragons or unicorns. And, as in the case of her House Elves, she made some modifications to her source before deploying it. But not to the point of explaining how her version *worked*.



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Toward the end of OotP Nearly Headless Nick tells Harry that all ghosts are the Revenants of wizards who have not passed through the Veil in the Death Chamber of the Department of Mysteries.

Lord Voldemort accounts to his followers in GoF that he was “less than the meanest ghost.”

In what way was VaporMort less than a ghost? What constitutes a ghost?

The ghost of a person, as opposed to a poltergeist — which is not the Revenant of anyone that was ever actually alive — is generally accepted to be the manifestation, or, as stated in HBP, the “imprint,” of the soul of the departed, retaining all of that individual’s evolved personality, and the self-identity, thoughts, and memories of that person in life, as well as his visual appearance at the time of death.

The soul is generally regarded to be the seat of the emotions and of self-awareness. Those who have been subjected to the Dementor’s Kiss have no such awareness, no manner of feelings or judgment, and without such self-knowledge are unable to access their own memories. Nor do they exhibit any signs of individual character.

Lord Voldemort would have been fully aware of this. He had almost certainly encountered dementors at some point before his first defeat, even if they had not been a part of his former army. And, indeed, he has gone out of his way to reinvent himself as a sort of dementor-surrogate.

We have also been given no indication whatsoever to lead us to suppose that Lord Voldemort places any value upon human emotions. From his own statements and those statements of



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his followers that we have been privy to, it appears that he ascribes to the belief that emotions are the handles that one uses to manipulate other people. One is best off without them, oneself. The wizard formerly known as Tom Riddle’s chief priority would, therefore, have been to insure that his consciousness and his knowledge would be preserved and would remain functional, whatever befell his physical body. And that whatever befell his physical body he would go on living, without taking any further consideration for the state of his soul. Indeed, it is now clear that he would happily mutilate that soul repeatedly to achieve this end, and did.

Consequently, one might conclude that VaporMort was less than a ghost because unlike a ghost, he was not the imprint of a complete soul, but only of a portion of one.



I think that, as with so much else in this series, we really do have to begin our reasoning with Tom Riddle. Creating Horcruxes seems to be something that was *peculiarly* well-suited to Riddle’s capabilities. And we already knew that a number of things that Riddle is capable of are understood to be extremely uncommon.

His ability as a Parselmouth, however, is not likely to be a relevant issue here. Albus has already told us that however rare the ability to understand and communicate with snakes may be, great and good wizards have shared this ability with Riddle. I think it is safe to say that we can dismiss Riddle’s being a Parselmouth from any consideration regarding the creation of Horcruxes.

Nevertheless, Riddle is widely understood to have at least



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one other presumably rare (although it's never actually stated in the text as being such) ability. An ability which he clearly kept even after his defeat, and probably retained to his very end. Even as a thing of shadow and vapor; a disembodied fragment of a soul, he retained the ability to take possession of others, even against their will. Not merely to dominate them and bring them under his control by force of will, or to control them by means of the Imperius curse, but to take full psychic and physical *possession* of them.

This would appear to be a quality inherent to Tom Riddle's underlying soul. One which is retained by any portion of it. Indeed, we saw that the soul fragment that haunted the Diary was able to take such possession of Ginny Weasley, ultimately even against her will, and over her resistance. Another such fragment came very close to overmastering Ron.

That doesn't sound nearly as innocent as chatting with snakes, and I am indebted to my fellow traveler, the LiveJournalist Swythyv, for giving me a timely nudge, reminding me of this particular detail.

So let's follow this particular line of inquiry a bit further shall we?



For that matter, it was around this stage of the proceedings that I was abruptly reminded of a series of three murder mysteries read some decades back, (The author I am informed by a correspondent is Rosemary Edgehill. The relevant title, is probably 'SPEAK DAGGERS TO HER', although the relevant volume could be one of the other two books in that set.) at any rate, in the first of these stories, the protagonist, a young woman who



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is a wiccan, is faunching over a young man who is deeply into Ceremonial High Magick, among whose grimoires turns out to be the description of a ritual in which one might attempt to divorce oneself from this world and its limitations by, among other similarly paradoxical feats, murdering oneself, yet continuing to live. I gather that this concept might not be altogether uncommon in occult studies.

Perhaps right about now we need to remind ourselves that what out here in the Real World is usually symbolic, in the Potterverse is just as likely as not to turn out to be literal. Perhaps Horcruxes are not just a folkloric element, after all.

It also occurred to me that if Ceremonial High Magick exists in the Potterverse our Tom would probably be very seriously into it. It would definitely chime right in tune with his taste for grandeur and self-aggrandizement. Interestingly, the only example of any true "ritual" to which we have been treated in the whole 4000 pages took place at Tom's instigation. i.e., His rebirthing ritual via the Cauldron.

However. One evidently cannot just split off a piece of their soul, grab it, and put it directly into an inanimate object. Souls are evidently fairly resilient, or something as extreme as murder would not be necessary in order to produce a Horcrux. And something *more* than a simple murder must be involved, since murder in itself does not expel bits of the murder's soul. Souls, however damaged, usually stay where they belong. It would take some maneuvering to get a fragment out of its source's body.

Once one considers the matter, however, it is quite blindingly evident that the typical method of getting *any* soul out of a body is by killing the body that houses it.



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So, what if the soul in that murdered body is not the Victim's? Or, rather, what if the body in question contains not *only* the Victim's soul?

What if the Murderer *takes possession* of the Victim before killing him? What would become of the portion of the Murder's soul that is possessing the Victim at the point of death?

It might get split off, mightn't it?

Thank you, Swythiv. I think you have just solved our fundamental riddle.



So. Let's explore a few possibilities, here.

To begin with, if we go by canon evidence, for those wizards (or witches) who share Tom Riddle's ability for taking possession of others, either by force or guile, the Horcrux-creation curse that so upset Horace Slughorn might not even be altogether necessary. Moaning Myrtle was unquestionably killed by looking at the Basilisk. Madam Hepzibah Smith was definitely poisoned. No cast curses were involved in either case, and yet Horcruxes are generally agreed to have been created from both deaths. Slughorn clearly did not even want to *think* about the creation of Horcruxes, and, consequently, we had missed the point that the essential factor was not, in fact, that some specific curse was known to create them, but the requisite *possession* of the victim at the time of death.

Tom's discussion with Slughorn is likely to have sent him straight off to the Room of Requirement in search of the banned books pertaining to Horcruxes. I suspect that it was only after Dumbledore became Headmaster that those were



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moved into the Headmaster's study for safekeeping, under his own eye. We can be fairly certain that Tom's search was successful. The Horcrux-creation curse was bound to have been found and probably copied out for his own reference, as would a great deal of related research, such as any required preparation of a potential housing to contain such a fragment, if any. (It should be noted that this appears to be unlikely. If Madam Smith's death did produce the Cup Horcrux, there was no time to prepare it in advance, unless such preparation consists only of a simple spell that can be cast on the fly.)

Now that I think of it, I would be willing to suggest that Tom's research pertaining to Horcruxes was, in fact, recorded, in detail, in his diary. The diary which, before it was converted into a horcrux, had probably not been so forthcoming about its contents to any random person who might have attempted to write in it.

No, I rather think that when the diary was just a diary (although calling it **just** a diary is a whopping understatement in itself), it was probably accessible only to Tom.

Among this research would certainly have been the directions on the necessity of taking possession of the victim whose death was to be used to split off the fragment. Most wizards and witches do not appear to be able to do this as a natural ability. That Tom was so able, and had known himself to be so able even before he knew that magic was real, probably both convinced him that; yes, he was *destined* to do this, and that it may have given him additional ideas.

He was, after all, still underage, and, as a child who was recorded as living in the Muggle world when not at Hogwarts, (unless I am correct about his summer apprenticeship at B&B)



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there was probably at least some form of Trace upon his wand. Nor, I think, did he like the idea of having any banned spell traceable to his wand in any case. He'd used Morfin's wand to murder the Riddles the previous summer. It may well have occurred to him that if the really necessary factor was the possession of the victim at the point of death, then the fragment ought to still split off *however*, the victim died. Just so long as he maintained his hold on them to their end.

Or, in short, Myrtle's death was an *experiment*.

Myrtle herself was no more than a lab rat, to Tom.

We have nothing to indicate how early in the school year he found the banned books and undertook his research of Horcruxes. Nor do we know just when in the year he finally discovered the entrance to the Chamber. And we do not know how many petrifications took place before opportunity handed Tom a trapped victim. But we can conclude that his research took place long enough before Myrtle's death for him to have prepared the Peverill ring to hold a soul fragment. If, that is, any such advance preparation is necessary.

And, yes, I am *quite* sure that the first Horcrux was the Ring. He wasn't yet finished recording that year into the diary when Myrtle was killed. Every scene that the Diary Revenant later showed Harry Potter took place *after* Myrtle was dead.

I seriously doubt that he would have been able to continue entering memories into the book once it became a Horcrux. If he couldn't bear to continue wearing the Ring after it became a Horcrux, he would hardly still be writing into the Diary, after it became one, either.

Nor, for that matter, was he likely to consider a Muggle paper

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diary to be an object of sufficient grandeur and significance to serve as a repository for a portion of his soul. Unlike an ugly, but nevertheless valuable, heirloom ring.



But in any case, it is a magnificent piece of irony in that the little fool of a teenaged Riddle, in his glorious quest to avoid ever dying, had no better sense than to commit himself into repeatedly having to **experience** his own death at not *that* much of a remove, and to effectively kill himself by inches in order to accomplish it.

It's hardly any surprise that Rowling ended up forcing him to finish the job, unassisted, either.

Madam Hepzibah Smith's death is widely agreed to have produced his 2nd horcrux, and on that one I am prepared to accept Rowling's off-canon word for it that it was the Cup. Chiefly because that reading makes all kinds of internal sense. He did not use any Horcrux-creation murder curse to create that one either.

And since he never had possession of the Cup until the night he killed Madam Smith, whatever preparation as is needed for a housing, if any, is probably not a long, drawn-out affair, but a spell which could be cast on site, before his victim finished dying (which in a poisoning might have taken a while), and freed the fragment which is to be contained.

But I rather suspect that he may have continued to experiment with alternate methods of killing the victim to create his Horcruxes. The documented Horcrux creation spell was only one possibility.

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In any case, I do suspect him to have attempted to use that one to kill Harry.



In his first life, apart from securing bits of his soul into physical objects, which was necessary to anchor himself to the material plane and prevent any other part of it from passing through the Veil, Riddle paid his soul, and its welfare no further attention. By the end of his first decade-long, voluntary exile from Britain he had engaged himself in creating at least three, and probably four of the known Horcruxes. Unlike the Diary, however, these fragments were not given any manner of direct communication. We had no indication that they would respond to or to attempt to interact with the holder of the artifact which housed them, and unlike the Diary, which could be written in, the other Horcruxes that we knew of for certain, (Cup, Locket, Ring) appeared to have had no “user interface” by which the holder could have interacted with the soul fragment they housed. And, indeed, we *did* encounter the Locket, briefly in OotP, and at that point in the series, it appeared to be completely inert.

Until a brief passage in HBP when Albus was presenting us with the official Riddle backstory, we had never had it hinted to us that Riddle had provided any of his Horcruxes with *any* obvious means by which to interact with those who came in contact with the artifact that housed them, although strong protections were (allegedly) placed on these objects to prevent them from being harmed.

Or at least so we were led to believe, *then*. This certainly



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appears to have been the case with the Ring. There is no point to giving an artifact a user interface if it is cursed powerfully enough to destroy anyone who tries to put it on. We were also told in HBP that once it had been converted to a Horcrux, Riddle was unwilling to continue wearing it himself, and ultimately concealed it in the ruins of the place from which it had come.

It is possible that he did this because he did not want to give the soul fragment housed in it any opportunity to reintegrate itself with its original source, but that is far from certain. In fact we have at this point no clue as to why he did not care to keep the Ring as close as he later kept Nagini. Excuse me if I dismiss this whole statement on the issue as yet another case of Rowling putting on airs to try to be interesting.

And frankly, the clumsily-retrofitted Tolkein’s “One Ring” rip-off in DHs, which was not overtly carried over to either the Cup or the Diadem, and only spliced onto the Locket — which upon our first introduction had been passed from hand to hand all around #12 without incident — at the last minute, made the story a lot cheesier than it had any authentic need to be.

Not to mention such behaviour would send up a giant red flag to anyone in the vicinity of it that: “Hey, something is *wrong* with this item!” I mean, if *you* had a Horcrux, would you *want* it to deliberately call attention to itself?

Not to mention throwing consistency out the window when you consider that the Locket apparently had no noticeable effect *whatsoever* upon Umbridge who had had it in her possession for over a year by the time the trio got it off her. It didn’t even affect her ability to cast a Patronus. I mean, stop and think. Do you believe that Tom Riddle was able to cast a



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Patronus? Or that his Patronus would have been a Persian cat?

Frankly, I'm a bit more bemused that *Dolores Umbridge* was able to cast a Patronus.

On the other hand, adopting that particular trope *does* provide a possible hint as to just when Tom decided to create the Diary. And just what gave him that idea. As well as a viable motivation of what he intended by it. Not to mention a suggestion of what, precisely, might be wrong with Bellatrix as a value-added bonus. So I'm not as insistent upon rejecting that particular trope as I was on first introduction.

Of course, once I had traveled a good deal farther down the tangled up backstory track I also thought of a very likely reason for why Tom might have wanted to leave a booby-trap in the ruins of the Gaunt hovel, but I won't go into that here. That is described in the 'O, the Times are Out of Joint!' essay, as well as the one specifically about Albus.



However, we need to keep in mind the fact that if Tom would customize one of his Horcruxes to serve as a potential booby-trap, he might have made other unprecedented modifications to others.

For one thing, although at 15 or 16 he may have been all kinds of confident that he had discovered "the answer" to never dying, by the time he was reaching his 50s he was probably all too aware that he was not immune to the passing of time. Wizards might have potentially long and active lives, but they do not *physically* live forever.

Deathlessness clearly wasn't the answer to everything.



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And the physical changes brought about by the ones he had already created were infringing on his ability to go out in public without unwanted notice.

The following explores a side issue which may or may not be relevant.

It was a correspondent who pointed out to me a possibility that I had not worked my way down the track far enough to put any attention toward unraveling yet.

In his speech to the mustered DEs in the graveyard meeting at the end of GoF, Voldemort openly admitted that he had not yet attained true immortality. That he would settle for getting his "old" body back again for the time being. This seemed to be a non-sequitur at the time. But perhaps we ought to be taking it a bit more seriously. Perhaps the statement, in itself, ought to strike us as ominous.

Indeed it is difficult to understand how he could have made any claim to be immortal if he was still physically vulnerable to time. My correspondent suggests that he had perhaps, already made plans to get around that particular obstacle.

Tom Riddle was stated as being the most brilliant (if perhaps also the most unwise) student that Hogwarts had ever seen.

Tom Riddle clearly intended that the Diary Revenant should take control of whomever the book might be entrusted. That in due course the (presumed?) child under such control would reopen the Chamber of Secrets and call forth the Basilisk.

So far the only goal that all that appears to meet is a determination to raise some havoc on Dumbledore's turf.

What if that was only step one? What if there was more to it than that?



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I can certainly imagine that the murder of Albus Dumbledore might have been an item on that particular agenda.

For that matter, closing the school down because there was a Basilisk roaming through it at liberty, so he could move in and take possession of the building doesn't sound out of the range of possibility, either.

But did Tom also plan that the Revenant should steal its victim's life and use that death to escape from the book? To effectively reincarnate itself? Or would that have been an unforeseen bonus?

The Diary Revenant was forever 16.

Would the reincarnated Revenant *remain* forever physically 16? Forever young, handsome, 16-year-old Tom Riddle? Or would it have begun to age once its return to the material plane was complete?

Or would its return have ever *been* truly complete? It had solidified to the point that it could pick up and hold Harry's wand, and play anagrams with it in floating letters of fire. It is assumed it would have eventually been able to cast an actual spell with it. But piercing and poisoning the Diary it had been housed in still managed to vanquish it into nothingness. Without physically touching it at all.

Had the adult Tom Riddle of 1980–81 extrapolated the possibility that a Revenant would reach a stage only a bit beyond the point that it did reach; a point that it would appear to be a solid human teenaged boy, able to move and act in the material world, but still actually anchored in the book, remaining as ageless as when the memories which formed it were first housed there? And still impossible to kill unless the book was destroyed?



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While, of course, the book was secured in a place that was inaccessible to anyone but a Parselmouth. With a Basilisk to guard it.

And would the "Master" soul fragment have been able to house itself in that reincarnated new body too? To share it with the Diary Revenant?

It wouldn't have been a truly *physical* body, and both fragments were from the same original soul. Even without remorse in the equation they might have been able to work in concert, even if they remained separate. Even forcible possession might not have burned the apparent body out as it did his other victims of possession. (Although back in 1981 he would have probably not have ever possessed any creature long enough to have burnt them out yet. That might have been an unpleasant surprise once he was off riding snakes in Albania.)

Or had he planned to *steal* it from the Revenant, forcing the Revenant into dormancy, back into the book, or into some other housing, keeping the new body in its own possession. A body in which Lord Voldemort might now move at will, without causing comment through either the wizarding or the Muggle worlds? By 1981 it had been over a decade since he was able to do that.

Had he already intended to ultimately remove himself from the monstrous ruin of his original body? Replacing it with a handsome, immortal, ageless one?

Would it have *worked*?

Perhaps we might be able to take some degree of consolation in the fact that he was unable to properly possess Harry Potter in the atrium of the Ministry of Magic despite, or perhaps *because* Mr Potter was already hosting one of Tom's Horcruxes. Whether this inability was due to Lily's sacrificial blood



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protection, or the damage to the Harrycrux wrought by the rebounding spell at Godric's Hollow is unknown, and unproven.

Still, once he had returned to the material world, had he intended to finally deploy the Diary during Harry's 5th year and take the final step to attaining his long projected immortality?

Only to discover that his servant Lucius had already deployed the Diary for his own purposes, in his Master's absence, losing it forever.

Small wonder his anger was "terrible to see."

Small wonder that he was determined to destroy Lucius's wife and child once Lucius had managed to hide himself away in Azkaban.

Or had Tom just not thought it through that far, and not known that there would be a way for the Revenant to escape from the book?

I suppose we will never be given a definitive answer to that question.



Indeed we have stumbled upon what appears to be the "crux" of the whole problem of the Horcrux.

According to Rowling, the Horcrux was developed by a wizard named Herpo the Foul, in classical times.

That gives us all more than ample time for the downsides and disadvantages of the process to have become obvious to anyone with more of a long view than a 16-year-old with a bee in his bonnet.

And you will notice that Horcruxes do not appear to be a method which is much resorted to in modern times. And Albus



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Dumbledore having pushed to ban the subject in *one* school in *one* European nation is unlikely to be the reason for *that*.

No, by modern times there has been an ample body of evidence for anyone who has made any kind of a study of the things to conclude that Horcruxes *simply do not work*.

Horcruxes are inherently a snare and a delusion.

Indeed, among the informed they are no doubt widely *known* to be a snare and a delusion.

Tying one's soul to the material plane *guarantees* that eventually one will find oneself a disembodied spirit.

Without whatever protection preserves the integrity of ghosts. A ghost is not capable of 'learning' anything new, or of reaching a higher level of maturity or wisdom than they had in life. They are quite literally a "dead end." But that inability to change is actually a form of *protection* for a ghost. A ghost *does not change*.

Disembodied spirits without such protection are highly vulnerable to those entities which feed upon chaotic energies. Which are precisely what *sustains* a disembodied spirit.

Entities which will effectively *eat* them, just as surely as any dementor.

I explored this issue in the 'foundation' essay on the history of magic. As it has been set up in the Potterverse, a witch or wizard's magic is an inherent quality of the soul. Magical persons do not simply *use* magic. They *produce* it. The eruptions of accidental magic produced by immature magical children is due to a build-up of the magical/chaotic energies which they naturally produce. As a magical person matures, their soul continues to produce these energies whether they use those energies for sustaining spells, or



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in merely sustaining their own physical well-being.

A living magical soul will continue to produce magical energies even if it is disembodied.

It will continue to produce these energies even if the personality which this soul originally sustained has been eroded, unraveled, or erased by the sort of chaotic entities which feed upon such energies.

Which they definitely will do. As a dragon might strip off the armor in order to devour what is inside. After all, such entities care nothing for the personal sovereignties of individual wizards.

Eventually, once unraveled, the still-living soul will continue to emit chaotic magical energies into the world, until it is itself eventually consumed, although the "person," which once identified itself as that soul will be long gone and forgotten.

In the case of a soul which is anchored by a Horcrux, however, there is no possibility of closing the channel. Even though the original witch or wizard who created that Horcrux no longer exists in any meaningful manner, and can never be restored to either humanity, or even any degree of actual consciousness, the channel will remain open, emitting magic into the world, until the Horcrux is destroyed.

Personally, I rather think that Albus may have compounded the potential damage of such a flawed process by stupidly attempting to suppress knowledge of such crude, unsuccessful attempts at achieving immortality in which wizards have managed to entangle themselves over the ages. This is a subject which ought to be presented in History of Magic. Indeed, it should be presented, and the reasons why it **doesn't work** gone into in sufficient grisly detail, some time around 3rd year,



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or otherwise early enough that the little fools won't accidentally trip over it later and consider it a viable answer to anything.

Tom's own testimony regarding his experience over a decade as an unprotected spirit (forcing himself to remain conscious, just in order to continue to *exist*) does not sound like anything that anyone with an informed view of the possibilities, would willingly or knowingly volunteer for. In order to retain his own identity he had to forego any sort of rest or inattention, or he would have become *unmade*. Indeed, I believe it is very likely that he really *did* lose quite a bit of his original essence, for what came out of that cauldron was certainly nothing resembling a complete personality.

And over the course of the series, that simulacrum of a wizard indeed appeared to *continue* to unravel even though it had managed to return to the physical plane. Rowling kept him offstage for most of the last half of the series, but even the glimpses we got made it clear that by the time he came out of that cauldron, the brilliant, charismatic Tom Marvolo Riddle that everyone seems to remember, had already been irredeemably lost beyond recovery..



Horcrux Redux

As I say, this piece had become so horrendously long that I was forced to split it years ago. There was also further addition and expansion, made during explorations in an e-mail discussion in the year following the release of DHs.

Basically this and its companion piece are a historical survey of the kind of explorations on the possibilities regarding the Horcruxes, mostly produced after HBP once we knew that we were going to have to be dealing with them. That puzzle kept the fandom fairly well occupied for the couple of years before we got the final book.

Since Rowling's version of what she *claims* happened, or of what thinks she was doing is both self-contradictory and incoherent, I find that I am more inclined to regard it in the light of a suggestion. One which I do not feel either obligated, nor particularly inclined to take at face value.

At the same time, since the bulk of the examination going on in this essay is of matters where Rowling never seems to have bothered to actually figure out how the business *works*, and then *tell* us how it worked, I'm feeling more or less justified in that.



So. Okay. Once again, it's time to review and consider what we thought we knew about the Horcruxes. And to figure out whether we knew anything more than we thought we did.

The whole issue of Lord Voldemort's Horcruxes is an overly complex one, and most of the following conclusions are reflective of what seemed to be possible regarding them as of the end of HBP, so you can expect all of these articles related to the Horcruxes to wander off on any number of tangents.



Horcrux Redux

The whole issue related to Horcruxes turned out to be involved enough to have required splitting it into more than one essay *long* before DHs came out. The essay; 'Raiders of the Lost Horcrux' is now ONLY really concerned with R.A.B., the missing Locket, and the adventure of the Dark Lord's sea cave. This one, and the essay; 'Horcrux Redux, Yet Again' concern the rest of the Horcruxes, and more theories about Horcruxes in general.



Rowling's handling of the "secret" of Lord Voldemort's deathlessness was poorly managed throughout the series.

Very poorly managed, in fact. Not to mention inconsistent. But at the end of HBP we did have reason to believe that we were finally on the right track. We knew we were still missing what we thought could have turned out to be crucial bits of information. In the event, it turns out that even though we probably were, Rowling never chose to pass any of that critical information on to us. So the whole business just remains poorly managed.

For, once again, in DHs Rowling seems to have rewritten the rules to suit her own convenience. Rendering much of what she had previously told us in HBP into gibberish.

I heartily disapprove of gibberish being represented as an explanation for anything.



First, however, a side-step: my "fellow traveler" the Live-Journalist Swythyv and I engaged in an ongoing e-mail discussion/debate for a good year after the release of DHs, and we covered a lot of very odd ground in that time.



Horcrux Redux

In August of 2008 we finally stumbled into the bog related to Horcruxes..

What set us off this time was another piece of Rowling's carelessness.

Well, I say that it was a piece of Rowling's carelessness. Swythv's mode of operation was to play devil's advocate and always to steadfastly maintain the fiction that Rowling is so much cleverer than her readers that there is likely to be a bomb-shell still waiting to explode related to the way the Potterverse has been set up, and the way that Rowling chose to misdirect us all in the course of telling her story.

But, regardless.

We had all been given to understand in HBP (and earlier) that the Diary had been *unique*. At the time that claim played very well. We had already encountered the Locket in its first cameo appearance by that time, and passed it hand to hand to everyone in #12, and not only had Harry no reaction to it whatsoever, but neither had anyone else. It was simply an inert artifact, a piece of jewelry which no one could get open. The Ring we hadn't encountered in HBP until after it had been denatured. So we never got to see it in action.

The Diary, on the other hand, had been deliberately designed to be a weapon. It had an interactive interface and was built to reach out and get a grip on whoever wrote in it. First to convince them that it was their friend, to encourage them to confide their closest secrets to it, and ultimately to possess, control and drain them of their "life force" until it managed to restore the soul fragment which it housed to the material plane.

This explanation worked remarkably well. Although you



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would have thought that even that early in the series, Harry's scar really *ought* to have had some reaction to it. Or at least to the *Diary Revenant*. Which it unaccountably never did.

Well, after all, if it had, the readers might reasonably have been *suspicious* of any item which we encountered over the course of the series which produced such a reaction in Harry's scar. Rowling couldn't bear to allow us any sort of an advantage like *that*.

Instead, Rowling appears to have quite deliberately hidden that relevant bit of information from the readers in Book 2, and then, in a lame and desperate attempt to insert some suspense and excitement into the black (plot) hole of the endless camping trip, in DHs the Locket — which we had already met — was suddenly acting like the One Ring and Hermione, the exposition machine, was earnestly informing us in chapter 6 that *all* Horcruxes will influence you if you get attached to them. Or, apparently, are even in proximity with them for any significant amount of time.

This was a stupid and shabby enough retrofit from the get-go, but Rowling didn't even bother to incorporate these changes thoroughly enough to take into account the fact that by the time we got it off her, Umbridge had been in possession of that Locket for over a year, and it hadn't even affected her ability to cast a Patronus.

Nor was there even the slightest indication that Umbridge was under Locket/Tom's control. She was just same monumentally unpleasant self she'd always been, with fewer outside limits to constrain her. And the Horcrux certainly hadn't had anything to do with giving her a promotion in the office.

Besides which, if *all* Horcruxes acted like that, they wouldn't



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really be very useful for prolonging their creators' lives would they? Anyone who came into contact with one of them would know within weeks that something was *not right* about those artifacts. Ginny figured it out in a couple of months, at the age of 11, for crying out loud. The Trio realized that the Locket was getting them down within a few weeks too.

The Diary was designed to be (possibly) expendable, since Tom had other Horcruxes out there. But if you only had one, you would damned well *want* it to act inert! Far less suspicious, all around.



Well, we kicked that around the block for a while, between us. And ultimately drifted off in a couple of other directions, but in the course of that discussion I came to a couple of related conclusions of my own.

We have it from Rowling (admittedly it's only in an interview statement, so she could reverse herself at any moment) that she thinks it was Herpo the foul who first came up with the idea of Horcruxes, as well as being the wizard to have created the first Basilisk.

Well, Herpo was a wizard from the days of classical Greece. That may have been a long time ago, but in our own world that was an era which was amply documented. The same cannot necessarily be said for all the eras since then.

Much of the fandom dates Horcruxes to ancient Egypt, which would chime nicely in tune with things like the Curse of the Mummy and other such popular tropes. But Rowling claimed it was Herpo and Greece.



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In any case, this gives us a good long stretch of time since Horcruxes were invented, and we have no idea how many wizards may have created Horcruxes in order to try to fend off death. Or how many of their makers may still be around, in some form or other (I very much doubt that they are walking around on their own two legs merely looking pale and interesting. Nothing says that a Horcrux renders you invulnerable to time).

All we know is that as recently as the 1940s no one was believed to have ever created more than one of them. What isn't so obvious, because no one has ever come out and said so, is that we haven't a clue regarding how many Horcruxes have been created since Herpo's day. Because the only ones that anyone knows about are the ones which somebody later managed to destroy. And it might be a mistake to suppose that the ones destroyed are the only ones that have ever been made.

We also hadn't any official information on *how* a Horcrux is made. Frankly, on this subject, I don't think Rowling herself has a clue. She imported the concept of Horcruxes from folklore where any number of villains seem to have managed to create external hearts/souls/lives and no one has ever bothered to ask about the mechanics of how they were supposed to have done that.

But the method used could make a difference.



Wizards with the same kind of natural ability to "possess" others that Tom can claim, appear to be vanishingly rare (thank ghod!). And a Horcrux ought not to have abilities that its creator doesn't. There may be other such wizards with such a talent out there, but there can't be many. And they are prob-



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ably not all in western Europe. Asia, maybe. I think there is something of a tradition for possession there. But there is no reason to suppose that those witches and wizards are all out there making Horcruxes.

Tom also tells us that the only ability he retained while disembodied was the ability to possess others. He overstates his case, for I am sure he was still a Parselmouth. But being a Parselmouth would have scarcely been useful for any purpose apart from entrapping snakes. Which seems to have been what he used it for. He lured them into range and then possessed them. Tom, it seems, even when reduced to no more than an incomplete, disembodied soul was able to reach out and take possession of other creatures. And in OotP, even after he already had a new body to live in, he was *still* able to reach out and (briefly, and with great pain) take possession of Harry. Ergo: it is a tenable hypothesis to suppose that Tom himself is able, at least briefly, to be consciously present in two bodies at once.

(ETA: if we are supposed to conclude that he *couldn't* possess Harry because of the Harrycrux already being in place, then how were he and Harry able to painlessly hitch a ride with Nagini, if she was also a Horcrux? Is this an indication that the Harrycrux is damaged?)

Well, as anyone who read my Changeling hypothesis essay over the decade or so that it was online, or the essay entitled; 'Broken Promise: An Introduction to Horcruxes' more recently is aware, I now contend that Tom Riddle's ability to possess others is a quality which contributed mightily to his ability to create seven Horcruxes (one of them in a form that was unintentional).

To state it more clearly; I now contend that to *take posses-*

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sion of the victim is an intrinsic component of the creation of a Horcrux. I flatly no longer support the loosey-goosey "kill the victim first and make the Horcrux later" postulation that Rowling appears to support. As I say, I don't think Rowling ever bothered to work out how one actually creates a Horcrux.

Particularly given that once one really gives it some thought, it is evident in canon that the actual cause of death is not an intrinsic factor in whether or not a Horcrux is created. Myrtle was killed by the *Basilisk*. Hepzibah Smith was *poisoned*. Yet both deaths are strongly presumed to have created Horcruxes. All that mattered to Rowling is that somewhere out there in the Potterverse there needed to be a method of doing it. Upon the whole, I believe we are all better off rolling our own explanation, than waiting around for her to tell us what to think on the subject. Particularly since she appears to have No Idea.

However, this iteration of the theory *would* tend to support the claim that all Horcruxes will keep trying to possess others, too. Or at any rate, those Horcruxes created by wizards (or witches) who have that natural ability for possession of others will. If the requisite possession was accomplished by means of an actual *spell*, then possibly not.

For that matter, given the kind of inert objects that people tend to use to make Horcruxes from, such a soul fragment would probably be desperate to latch onto any source where it can see and hear and have some kind of sensory input again.

And that by the time they are in a position to do that, every single one of them is stark raving mad.



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Slughorn tells us in HBP that to commit murder tears the soul. I'm sure that he is correct. But what he does not, and probably cannot tell us is that to commit murder will necessarily tear pieces of it *off*. The soul may rip into the middle from an edge, or along a fold, or off an existing rent (if there is one), or make a hole, or anything at all, leaving perhaps a tattered edge, but it will not necessarily produce a damaged soul *and* a loose fragment suitable for framing. Indeed, if, as he claims, the soul is *supposed* to remain whole and inviolate, for a piece of a soul to actually get separated from the rest would probably be vanishingly rare under normal circumstances. And, would indeed be, "against nature." Consequently, it might not be possible to spontaneously DO that, no many *how* many murders one committed.

Consequently, "the spell" that Slughorn refuses to speak about and starts hyperventilating at the very thought of, probably *assures* that when the soul is torn there will be a clean split and a separate fragment.

And one of the most certain ways of splitting something cleanly is to slice it apart when it is braced between two anchored points.

Yes, killing people will tear your soul, But it does not guarantee that the soul will be torn into individual bits, nor will the act of murder remove any of the bits to an external housing. Your soul, even if it is in bits remains safely inside your body. I also do not accept that there is any way in which you can select a specific fragment of your soul and exorcise it from your own body at some later date. I do not even accept that you can look inside yourself and gauge the condition of your own soul to see



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whether there are loose bits available for rehousing.

And, also consider, the most obvious way to get a soul out of a body is to kill the body that it is housed in.

Do you see where I am going here?

If you have *possessed* your victim, and then kill him, *possibly* using a spell sequence specifically designed for that purpose, it splits off the piece of your soul that is in the *victim's* body. And since *you* are still alive, that soul fragment (at that point) tries to get back to the rest of its original source. You catch it in the artifact you've prepared as a housing and presto, there's your Horcrux. You can add further protections/curses/whatever to the housing later. It's possible that the spell that kills the victim and splits the soul also makes the fragment visible, at least temporarily. At least to you, which would assist in its capture.

Now, a wizard who is *not* naturally able to take possession of a victim has an additional step to perform, since in that case the possession would *also* need to be accomplished by a spell. I suspect there is such a spell, or rather, a spell *sequence*. And that is what made Horace so squeamish. Imperius is bad enough. An actual *possession* spell might well be sickening. Particularly a possession spell specifically for the purpose of controlling somebody's actions in such a way as to enable you to more easily murder them.

Such a possession spell could quite possibly be a variant on Imperius, just as any specific Horcrux-creation spell could be a variant on AK (at any rate, it is green like an AK. Harry remembers a flash of green). But given that we know that allegedly two of Tom's Horcruxes were probably created without his resorting to any independent spells at all, we can not count on that.



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Still, if such a Horcrux-creation spell does exist, Tom might have chosen to use it in a case where he believed that the gesture itself particularly mattered.

All of which right there eliminates all of Albus's nonsense (which Rowling since seems to have chosen to dispense with herself) over Tom wanting to use particularly "significant" deaths to create his Horcruxes. If what you're dealing with is a ritual proxy suicide, *any* victim's death is going to be a "significant" death.

Which is also why the soul fragment in Harry was still in Harry. Tom had possessed him in preparation to making his 6th, and final, Horcrux, but that Horcrux never got properly made.



Actually the real issue regarding the screw-up at Godric's Hollow, isn't the Harrycrux. There are any number of reasonably plausible ways to account for the Harrycrux.

The problem is accounting for the damage to the *house*.

That the house blew up may be all very dramatic, but it is a piece of drama to *no purpose*.

Why would a spell which *hit* a human target, and allegedly rebounded to destroy *another* human (well, arguably so) target, damage the house *as well*? Are we supposed to conclude that it gained power with each contact until it finally hit something inert and expended itself? *Why*?

Quite frankly, by this time it is easiest to conclude that Pettigrew vanished Tom's body and damaged the house himself just to sow confusion.

After all, we saw the "log" of the most recent spells cast



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by that wand play back in the Priori Incantatum sequence of GoF, and there was certainly no house-wrecking spell recorded among them.

Nor, for that matter, any spell presumably cast at *Harry*.



Exploring the issue of what happened at the showdown in Godric's Hollow would be more appropriate in the essay entitled; 'C.S.I.: Godric's Hollow' later in this subcollection. We don't need to follow that trail here.



The ability to possess others would make a very big difference to what one can accomplish without a body. Because I contend that anyone who creates a Horcrux is eventually going to be in that particular boat (talk about a ship of fools...).

Because the fact remains that making a Horcrux does *not* mean that you *physically* live forever. We have no evidence whatsoever to suggest that it makes you immune to time. Tom created his first Horcrux at 16. We saw him in his early 20s with Madam Smith. We could see he was not still physically 16. Eventually, even with a Horcrux, you are still going to lose your body — or it will become so enfeebled that you will be trapped in it. Only anomalies like Tom, who can naturally reach out and possess others get any kind of benefit from creating Horcruxes. Otherwise all a wizard accomplishes by it is something that will diminish his soul in order to tether it on this side of the Veil, and since any wizard has the option of choosing to become a ghost, and can do so with a *complete* soul, a Horcrux effectively



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produces absolutely zilch. There's a reason Horcruxes are rare. People eventually discovered that they *didn't work*.

And, frankly, being a ghost is the sounder choice, since you are pretty well guaranteed to remain *yourself* as a ghost, rather than having to fight to retain your identity and stay aware every single moment, without rest, in ever-present danger of unraveling, as Slughorn describes it, and even Tom confirmed it back in GoF.

It's small wonder Tom is such a world-class fruitcake. He's got more than a decade of sleep deprivation to make up for. Maybe that's why he was so curiously passive once he finally managed to resurrect himself. Because I'll swear he did next to nothing for the rest of the series. Perhaps he just gave his followers a few basic instructions and a free pass, and was sleeping it off.



And, a Horcrux-creator who cannot natively take possession of others is a sitting duck for the kind of attrition which ultimately will unravel any sense of identity or self-consciousness. It wouldn't matter if he was technically *alive*. He would no longer be himself.

The whole concept of building Horcruxes, when you really examine it, is a monumental scam from the get-go. I think old Herpo must have been pretty far gone in a Dark Arts-related dementia when he came up with that trick. And I don't think we need to look very far to figure out just what kind of chaotic entities may be hanging around waiting to unravel such defenseless, disembodied, and incomplete souls, and *eat them*, do we?



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A ghost cannot perform magic, so any such hypothetical chaotic entities just leave them alone. But undead souls still retain that link to the source of their magic. Even incomplete souls can channel magic — so long as they remain at least technically alive. In fact they probably *leak* magic, or, rather, magically-charged emotional detritus, even more freely than complete souls do. And we know what kind of entities appear to feed on that. None of them mean humans well.

In the current iteration of the 'History of Magic' essay I have postulated the existence of "thin places" in the world where magic leaks into the material plane in the form of what in Real World folklore has become codified as a "holy well." This is fresh, new magic which is emitted as a steady rate, unlike the magic channeled by humans. It's nature is still chaotic, but it is not conscious and it is certainly not hostile. Magical creatures, whether sentient being, fantastic beast, or magical botanical tend to be drawn to the sites of these wells and to settle in the vicinity.

In the History of Magic essay I also touched upon the chthonic cults which in early times, particularly in the centuries before the development of the cored wand, attempted to duplicate the rare holy wells by creating "pools" of power through unsavory and dangerous practices.

An unraveled soul would also duplicate the function of a well. For it would also be an entry point into the physical world of magical energies. The souls that unravel are probably serving as a snackbar for the kind of entities that feed on raw (i.e., chaotic) magic. Such unraveled souls probably account for a number of odd anomalous places of "power". Ones that do not entail "holy wells" or whatever other natural phenomena



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would account for such an entry point.

Since at least some of these false wells may have originally been human souls, it is possible that the emission of magic from them fluctuates, since humans, without wands, appear to be unable to regulate their channeling of magical energies. But it is unknown whether the impacted quality of human magical channeling is fundamental to the human soul or a by-product of attempting to channel magic through a human body. Humans, as I have pointed out before, are not inherently a magical species, and their bodies are not necessarily designed for the effective channeling of magic. It is scantily possible that an unraveled and disembodied soul would create a false well which emitted magic as steadily as a true well. It would not, however be accompanied by the water source which normally accompanies a “holy well.”

Nor can we count on the magic emerging from such an entry point being typically non-hostile.

We are in a peculiar sort of position since we can do something like a “forensic” examination of early times, up to about the founders era, using our own Real World folklore to fill in gaps and examine the “bones” of what appears to have survived to the present day. But, much later than the Peverills (who Swythyv and I placed somewhere around the beginning of the 13th century) and we might as well be playing “telephone,” because the two worlds’ social histories start diverging wildly. But there do still seem to be a few points in common.

For one thing, I suspect that after Nicholas Flamel and his wife were known to have succeeded in creating the Philosopher’s Stone at the end of the 14th century, there may have been far fewer people interested in creating Horcruxes in an

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attempt to extend their lives. A Horcrux, after all wouldn’t have the additional benefits of making you as rich as you wanted to be, or of producing the universal panacea in addition to the elixir of life. But it would have taken a while before the news of Flamel’s achievement traveled beyond Paris, and longer yet before people believed the report.

And, of course, no one but the Flamels seem to have managed that feat, either. But most wizards with anything like a functioning moral compass would have made that their project rather than looking for instructions on making Horcruxes.



While we are on the subject of a moral compass; anyone who would contemplate the creation of a Horcrux is either an unreflective fool, or a creature who completely lacks one.

It is one thing to propose to mutilate one’s own soul — and that is bad enough in itself — but upon anything like a second thought, it is apparent that one is not merely spiting off a fragment of one’s essential self, but subjecting that fragment to *unending torture* as well. Walling it up away from any sort of sensory input in a sort of premature burial, without even a cask of amontillado to keep it company.

Or even the prospect of death to end the torment.

Horace Slughorn’s squeamishness on the subject of Horcruxes, is not that difficult to understand. Slughorn may be a bit too willing to overlook those who he regards as unremarkable, but he is not a cruel man.



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At the end of HBP we all suspected that relevant information had been deliberately saved up for Book 7, or that various details may have just fallen through the cracks.

Particularly where it came to the issue of Regulus Black and the hijacked Locket.

Still, I felt we could all be sure that while we may or may not have heard the last of Regulus Black, we definitely hadn't heard the last regarding Tom Riddle.

About whom we had just way too many contradictions to ever really sort out.

For example: at the climax of Goblet of Fire, we observe Voldemort publicly admitting to his mustered Death Eaters that what he has achieved is not true immortality and that he will temporarily "settle" for having his former body back again. And, indeed, he can hardly be truly immortal if he is still vulnerable to Time. In the same scene he also is publicly reminding the whole assembly that they all know the steps that he has taken to achieve deathlessness.

Excuse me?

Two books later this version of the backstory has gone completely walkabout. It is now implied that yes, he is immortal, inasmuch as any human being can be, and that while we are reminded of his boasts in the graveyard about having pushed the boundaries of Magic farther than any other wizard, the creation of a Horcrux is implied to be something so vile that even the Death Eaters would shrink from it in horror; that Voldemort is convinced that nobody knows about his Horcruxes, and that it certainly cannot be general knowledge that he has made half a dozen of them.



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What gives?

And is this even the case? We cannot even know that for certain.

But that version is "The Official Word according to Albus Dumbledore." And while John Granger's "Tom Riddle and his Scar-o-Vision" theory would nicely reconcile the issue, I found myself reluctant to adopt it wholesale. That theory plays extremely nicely with others, but it feels like a snare and a delusion. It makes things just a bit *too* easy. In fact, it constitutes a walking temptation to fall into lazy reasoning. Indeed, it's too tempting by half.



We'd been led to believe that the subject of Horcruxes has only been banned at Hogwarts comparatively recently. Within the last century in fact. And while the creation of them must have always been a very rare occurrence, the knowledge of the underlying theory seems as though it may previously have been reasonably widespread. We still did not know this for certain, but I did not think that this was where Rowling intended to drop one of her bombshells.

To begin with: Horace Slughorn is surely the last wizard who would ever be tempted to contemplate the creation of a Horcrux, yet he seems conversant enough with the theory that underlies them. Admittedly, it is entirely possible that it was Albus Dumbledore's very fierceness on the subject which prompted Horace to research what all the fuss was about and found the answer sickening, but the fact remains that in his day one *could* readily look such information up.

And, for all his supposed power, Albus was only able to sup-



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press the information regarding Horcruxes at Hogwarts itself. The information is still out there in any private library which ever had it, and even current books on the Dark Arts may still discuss the subject, so long as they do not care whether they will be able to sell the book as a text to Hogwarts students or to its library.

Indeed, wizards from the generations before Tom Riddle's may have known about the process fairly routinely. Much as current generations know about the three spells which are classified as Unforgivable.

Which, when taken in concert with the fundamental asymmetry of the reasoning which claims that while to die is far from the worst thing that can happen to you, to kill is the ultimate evil — leaving completely out of the equation the issue of killing in the line of duty (people do keep reminding us that this is supposedly the story of a war, you know) and totally overlooking the fact that the whole point of this series is that we have been set up to expect it to end with the hero killing somebody — to popular acclaim and a victory parade — I ended up feeling very cross at all of the fundamental contradictions and double-standards on display. Fortunately we did get a hint that Rowling was aware of this, and that even if she did end up botching the job in the end, she at least intended to address it.

(ETA: Well, I suppose you could say that in the end she did. Even if only to the extent of having events conspire to trick Tom Riddle into killing himself.)

Of course, at the time, I thought that she may have already given us the tools to figure most of it out for ourselves. Not all of it, perhaps. She had to have saved up something critical for

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the final book.

But we still had a very awkward set of contradictions and cross-purposes to try to reason from. Particularly when we could not know just how much of what was stated openly up to GoF may have been shot off in the off-the-map revision of Rowling's Master Plan between Volume 4 & 5 which we were told took place, out of the public eye.

I supposed that at the very least we needed to assume that the Death Eaters may have been led to believe that they *think* they know something about Voldemort's method of attaining deathlessness. A false impression which is simply not the case. And one that probably had nothing whatsoever to do with the creation of multiple Horcruxes.



So, about those Horcruxes:

Upon consideration: I thought that when we finally came to it, there might turn out to be rather less to the problem of hunting the Horcruxes than met the eye. At least at first glance. At second glance, I thought that what we expected to be the easy part, probably wouldn't be.

For example; I was beginning to suspect that we would not be forced to go out and hunt for all four of them. And that was a good thing, too.

We only had one more book in which to wrap this business up. There's got to be a shortcut in there somewhere. Otherwise this last leg of the trip is going to be in serious danger of starting to feel awfully repetitive and episodic. Plus; having to hunt down four of the things would overbalance the action to

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the point that the whole last book would end up feeling like constituting nothing but hunting Horcruxes. (ETA: I called that correctly anyway. I would have just as soon not.) And to that point Rowling generally just hadn't given us books that were only about one thing.

But each of her books, so far, *had* appeared to have a single overriding central issue, as well as at least one related subplot. I couldn't imagine that she was going to suddenly branch out into a completely different technique with the 7th in a series of 7. (ETA: *sigh* It would have been nice if I had been right about that at least. But I really cannot accept the childhood and youth of Albus Dumbledore as constituting a legitimate subplot. That was even more totally unnecessary and irrelevant to the actual story arc than the identity of the Half-Blood Prince.)

Rowling finally put one of her major cards down on the table when she introduced the concept of the Horcruxes. It was clear to just about every reader that the central issue of Book 7 was going to involve getting those sorted out.

But, let's face it, a quest for a single critical item is a lot more focused and likely to be interesting than a diffuse scavenger hunt for four of them. At least from the structural standpoint of putting together a satisfactory storyline. Since, let's face it, that is the task that Rowling was up against.

We'd had one book already that set Harry a number of separate tasks. The first, when successfully completed, led us directly to the starting point for the second; then we got thrown an unexpected extra one before Harry was able to prepare for that 2nd task. We knew about the 3rd task well in advance but apart from hitting the books with Hermione and practicing



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spells that *might* come in useful there wasn't a lot that Harry could really do about it until it was upon him. And at the end of that one he was unexpectedly confronted by his enemy.

Rowling mostly avoided the pitfall of an episodic plot in GoF by keeping the official set "tasks" pretty firmly in the background and filling the foreground with other concerns: the falling out with Ron; the ongoing mystery of who put Harry's name in the goblet in the first place. She wasn't really likely to be able to do this so effectively when the task consists of rooting out and disarming four Horcruxes, but there was still room for some leeway.

Nevertheless, given the way the books all seemed to produce echoes of one another, and the way the 5th book reflected the 1st, and the 6th replayed elements from the 2nd, could we help but wonder whether part of the pattern of the 4th would be incorporated into the 7th along with various even more recognizable elements of the 3rd?

I thought that we could probably expect to turn up clues to the Cup, the "mystery" Horcrux, or the 6th Horcrux in the course of the hunt for the Locket. Harry ended the 6th book focused on finding R.A.B. and discovering what happened to the Locket. I figured that that particular hunt would probably serve as the launching point for the quest for all the Horcruxes. Most of us did.

At the end of HBP, we had four Horcruxes unaccounted for. We knew what two of those looked like and had no official news on the others, apart from Albus's suggestion of the snake.

My own gut feeling — which had absolutely no authority on the matter, as I was well aware — was that Harry already had possession of (was) one of them. I was also now inclined to



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suspect that Voldemort had possession of another. These two would be brought to the final confrontation and both would be revealed at that time. This would no doubt blindside everybody.

But I did not believe that the one in Tom's custody was the snake.



I did not know whether this was the way that Rowling would play it or not, but it had occurred to me that we might get a stronger, more engaging story if she let Harry concentrate on the quest for one of the Horcruxes, and it led us a merry dance nearly all the way through the book.

And the one that seemed best fitted for that particular role really was the Locket. We start out the book with Harry having already decided to follow the trail of the Locket.

I did think that we might be able to expect a protracted search for the Locket. Over the course of which the trio may have thought they had found it, and it would turn out that what they had been following was the trail of one of the others.

Because in the course of this quest, I thought we would probably stumble across a lead on another one of the accursed things (rather than finishing one hunt and starting a new one, which would interrupt the flow of story). The 2nd one would almost certainly be the Cup. Because with the Cup, we, and Harry, were in a position to recognize it when we saw it. And that discovery would make a fine pick-me-up in the middle of a long slog. Because we would probably be no closer to the Locket at that point than we were at the beginning. Or not that we would be able to tell.



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Which is why I suspected that we would NOT find the Locket in Kreachur's nest. You don't get a lot of scope for turning up clues to the other Horcruxes if you can go directly to the Locket in the boiler room of the Black House, resolve that issue, and find yourself back at square one with no place to go from there. And Harry and his friends were going to look just too thick for belief if Rowling sent the trio all over creation before leading them back to #12 to look for it. I suspected we might be following that Locket for as long as we were following the trail of Nicholas Flamel and the Philosopher's Stone.

And it finally sank in, thanks to a comment from a correspondent, that there was actually some canon support for this hypothesis. We already had a magical item in our possession which might be perfectly capable of pointing us right to where any Horcrux may be!

So long as it happened to be in a place that the item knew about.



The Marauder's Map will track you — as yourself — living or dead, regardless of whether you are invisible, Polyjuiced, or creeping about in your Animagus form. So, just what is it about you that remains unchanged despite shape, visibility, or apparent species?

Or life status. The Hogwarts ghosts, and Peeves, also show up on it.

Peeves we know is a spirit, but he not really a ghost, for he was never actually alive. But a proper ghost we had already had defined to us as "the imprint of a departed..." what?



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Holy hauntings, Batman! It looks very much as if what the Marauder's Map is actually tracking are *souls*.

There are still some bugs in this hypothesis, of course. We don't know what the Map would do regarding soul *fragments*. They may show up in really teeny-tiny lettering that just looks like a random smudge. They may just show up as initials, or random letters, not a proper name. But they ought to show up.

And there is also the problem of whether or not the Map knows about the place where they are. The Marauder's Map was a rather impressive piece of work. But it was still just the work of a group of schoolboys. And by that time in the series (i.e., HBP) the reader was able to figure out what some of the magical principles they had adapted into it were.

The fact that it reveals or conceals its contents by a password is a no-brainer. Where any mechanical lock can be opened by Alohomora, any intended private space is secured by passwords. It took no flash of genius to decide upon that.

It also seems to include some of the technology from portraits in that there is a lingering imprint of the creators' personalities which is invoked when someone attempts to view it without giving the proper password. Much the way the Sorting Hat claims to be able to represent all four of the Founders. That the personality imprints recognized Snape's name accounts for the customized insults the Map produced especially for him. Had Colin Creevy attempted it, the insults would have probably been much more generalized.

And then there is that really impressive tracking charm.

We don't know whether they invented it, or modified it. But I'd vote for the latter. If the MoM can track underage sorcery,

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and the Hogwarts quill can record magical births, we can assume that there is likely to be a whole class of tracking magic available for some clever kids to adapt. And they were able to modify the charm so that it only appears to track humans, and specific other creatures (i.e., Mrs Norris). We've never had any indication that the Castle's resident House Elves show up on it, despite the fact that the Marauders were perfectly well aware of the House Elves. They'd been in and out of the kitchens for years.

But they still needed to draw the actual map themselves. And the places that they could not get into (like the other Houses' common rooms) are shown as blank areas.

Harry's use of that Map had been pretty rudimentary. He generally checked it to see whether a route he wanted to use was clear, or to see if anyone was moving around so he could go another way. He hadn't simply viewed the map to see just who is out in the public areas, or who may be standing somewhere without moving.

Maybe in a presumably empty school, perhaps any name would seem worth a closer look.

But I do still suspect that the Map doesn't give any indication of the secret places that the Marauders never managed to find.

No Chamber of Secrets, for example. And the fact that Sirius Black was suggesting that the DA use the Shrieking Shack for their meetings implies that although Harry later believes that he couldn't see into or get into the Room of Requirement was because of Draco's orders to keep people out, the fact that the Room never showed up at all, could have been due to the fact that the Map may simply just not know about it.

Which laid out a rather creepy potential suspense template

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for Harry and his friends, sneaking through the closed, and presumably empty school, confident that the Map can show them all of the secret ways, when it doesn't know all of them.

But Riddle does. Or at least he knows a few *different* ones.

And both Snape and Pettigrew know about that Map. Although I suspect that neither is volunteering that information to their Master.

Another ugly implication is that if the Map is tracking souls, it probably isn't tracking bodies.

Riddle could probably march that whole army of Inferi into the Great Hall and the Map wouldn't even blink.



Which leaves us with the question of the final two of the set of Horcruxes.

With a more focused quest, such as is postulated above, for the final two Horcruxes to converge at the finish line would certainly be in keeping with the suggested pattern (and Rowling's claims) of two halves of the problem finally coming together in the final book.

Because the kind of stop-start action of hunting and destroying Horcruxes one at a time — and then having to start over on the next one — just didn't really seem to be on. That would be a *really* awkward kind of a storyline to try to wrangle and make interesting. No. Just — *no*.

So I thought that either, one of the Horcruxes would lead directly to another or the kids would find out that Reggie did manage to neutralize his, or something else ought to be bound to turn up. Between getting hit by the cloudburst of



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"other shoes" still waiting to fall on us, discovering what was so important about Lily (or that stupid cloak), finding out the significance of the notorious "gleam," getting ourselves blown up by the last of the Snape bombshells, and having to deal with the big show-down with Voldemort himself, having to also root out and neutralize all four missing Horcruxes, one at a time, was just too many.

But, as well as it seemed to fit the requirements, we didn't know whether Rowling would use this kind of more focused structure until the last book was out.

(ETA: Oh if only, if only. Instead we got the totally clunky and unexplained contrivance of arbitrarily reopening the Tom/Harry mental link in the other direction and having Harry receive what amounted to divine guidance by way of postcards from the universe. Or at least from the Prophecy demons' 2nd cousins all the way through the book. *Feh*. I "feh" upon it.)

I did at least confidently expect that Harry and his friends were eventually going to manage to locate and dispose of both of the Horcruxes where Harry knows what he is looking for. Which is to say, the Locket and the Cup.

Plus, of course, eventually figuring out that he himself was the last of the set.



According to Albus, Tom was still one short of his full set when he went to murder Harry.

That's a clue, you know. When you really stop and think about it, that whole statement is rather odd. In fact it is a clue to a couple of things.



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The first is that Dumbledore just wasn't telling Harry (or us) everything he suspected. Here he has only *just* finally examined Slughorn's memory which tells us that there were supposed to be 6 of the accursed things and five minutes later he's already tallied up how many of them Tom had created by when? C'mon.

I say that Dumbledore had already figured out that there had to be more than one of them, and he knew that it was going to turn out to be a "significant" magical number of them. Dumbledore, unlike Riddle may not have ever studied Divination, but I'll bet you anything you please that they both studied Arithmancy. That factor alone had probably already narrowed Dumbledore's theory down to a choice between either 3 or 7. I think Albus already suspected it was probably 7, Slughorn's memory just confirmed it.

I do think that during Riddle's 10-year absence from Britain Albus's investigations were almost certainly tracing Tom's back-trail regarding matters of more vital interest to himself, which was not Horcruxes. It was only after Albus got a look at Tom upon his return to ask for the DADA post, sometime between '57-'63 that he would have had reason to conclude that Horcruxes had been added to the equation. Possibly on Alastor Moody's suggestion.

After all, Albus had personally seen the subject of Horcruxes banned at Hogwarts before Tom even showed up to ask about them. Possibly before Tom was even born. And by everything we've been given to reason from, Tom still managed to create his first one completely off Albus's radar before he even finished school.

But when he showed up looking like a melting wax image after spending a decade off the map, Albus must have started



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wondering what he'd been up to, and just what use he might have put those three valuable and historic artifacts that he had managed to purloin to, before he disappeared from Britain (by that time Albus would have spoken to Morfin Gaunt and known about the missing ring). If Albus knew enough about the subject of Horcruxes to get it banned when he wasn't even Headmaster yet, he probably knows at least as much about them as Tom Riddle. From a theoretical standpoint, probably more.

Which to Albus may have been a hint right there that he was up against a soul in multiple parts. Tom was now looking greedy enough to turn every significant artifact he could get his hands on to such use. A 3-part soul might have been significant enough to satisfy him. But that would have meant that he had only used two of the stolen artifacts for Horcruxes. And Albus knew Tom well enough to know that he wouldn't have been able to resist taking "possession" of all three. 4, 5, and 6, are not magically "significant" enough numbers to suit Tom Riddle's opinion of himself. So he was almost certainly aiming for 7.

The only question left was whether he had attained it yet. Once Albus had figured that much out, and had given it some hard consideration, by HBP Albus provisionally — and retroactively — suspected that at the time of his first defeat, Tom had still been at least one short.

ETA: and Rowling summarily dismissed this whole line of inquiry when she sat down to write DHs, too. For there is no indication in the alleged flashback of Tom's first defeat that he had shown up at the Potters with any intention of creating a Horcrux at all. Instead the whole passage in HBP has now been trivialized into just another instance of Albus buttering Harry



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up. And I find myself disbelieving that as well. She shouldn't have made such a point of it in HBP unless it was supposed to *mean* something. And it all reads better if it *does* mean something.

Since that whole stupid sequence fits *nothing* that was ever set up in any earlier part of the series, *nor* anything that comes after it, I have since concluded that the whole "flashback" was a fantasy on Tom's part about what he *ought* to have done on that long-ago Halloween night. Just kill the kid (*and* his fool of a mother!) and have done with it. Forget about making a Horcrux from this one. Maybe the Longbottom brat...



The second thing to have come out of that particular discussion was the sudden, rather unaccountable suggestion that the final Horcrux was Nagini.

I imagine that the majority of the fandom probably agreed with me that the 6th Horcrux was not Nagini. (And, in strict accuracy, Nagini turned out to have been an extra 7th Horcrux, even though she was indeed the final one.) At first glance, one can't imagine why Dumbledore should have made that suggestion — considering the way that he'd been dancing all around the subject of the significance of Harry's scar from the first chapter of the first book.

From a meta standpoint the suggestion must have been intended to serve as a hint to the reader that a Horcrux can be made from a living creature. I thought at the time that we might be supposed to conclude that this is simply one of Dumbledore's lesser mistakes.

But even mistakes (had it been such) tend to happen for a



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reason, and it finally surfaced that Dumbledore's suggestion of Nagini being the 6th Horcrux didn't actually come out of nowhere, much as it may have appeared to. The inception for Dumbledore's theory that the 6th Horcrux might possibly be the snake could have been suggested to him by the scene in OotP where Albus consults one of the little silver instruments in his office after Harry reports the snake's attack on Arthur Weasley, just before the Christmas holidays.

Dumbledore already knew perfectly well that Tom was involved in that attack. A gigantic, non-native, venomous snake doesn't just randomly get into the DoM and go looking for someone to bite. And Harry wouldn't have been linked into the business if Tom wasn't involved, since Harry's connection is to *Tom*, not to just any old plain-vanilla snake, even if he can understand them.

So, as soon as Harry reported a snake attack Albus knew that whatever his instrument showed, it would probably be represented by a snake. That was no surprise, and Harry could see that Albus was not surprised. Nor was Albus surprised when the pale green smoky snake split into two snakes.

It didn't, however, split into *three* snakes. There was a physical snake, and there was Tom. Harry *ought* to have been represented as well. (Which for the record I still think ought to have been the case. Particularly since Nagini was also a Horcrux.)

What now seemed very likely to me in retrospect was that the instrument was representing Harry and Tom, and ignoring Nagini, who is just a plain old snake, even if a remarkably large one (enlarged by magic? Maybe).

Well the big bombshell at the conclusion of OotP is that



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Albus Dumbledore finally had to admit to us, and to himself that he makes emotional mistakes.

He also had repeatedly demonstrated his conviction that other people cannot handle the truth. I was beginning to wonder whether, perhaps, he wasn't quite as good at handling it himself as he needed to be.

Considering that it took until the aftermath of the debacle in the Atrium at the end of OotP to force Dumbledore to even tell Harry about existence of the damn Prophecy, I supposed it would have hardly been in character for Albus, one book later, to pop out with; "And now that you know what a Horcrux is, Harry, I am sorry to have to inform you that you are one!"

Despite the fact that he had been dancing all around the issue of the significance of Harry's scar and the nature of his connection to Lord Voldemort ever since the opening of the series, the very fact that he threw out the suggestion that Nagini may be the 6th Horcrux at all may be an even bigger hint that he might have managed to lead himself up the garden path over the previous year.

After all, he would hardly *want* to have to grapple with the problem of Harry being the 6th Horcrux, which will also have to be destroyed in order to get rid of their enemy. He is certainly determinedly not admitting that possibility to Harry, insisting that his power to vanquish the Dark Lord has to be based on something else altogether.

And, to give Albus credit, once examined, there *is* a lot of weirdness concerning Lord Voldemort's dealings with that snake. So, the suggestion didn't just come out of thin air, even though one certainly gets that impression when Albus first pops out with it.



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And I thought that Harry might eventually remember the image of that smoky snake splitting into two snakes, and interpret it differently from the way Albus had. He was there, after all, and he *knows* that *he* was one of those snakes.

Instead, we discover that Albus was right, and that Tom, for what appears to be absolutely no reason that makes any kind of sense, made a Horcrux out of a living snake.

Admittedly he had a clear and present reason to want to keep that snake close to him at the time. He needed her venom in order to survive for a year while he was waiting to be reincarnated (and he probably magically enlarged her to increase the venom supply). But that hardly required turning her into a Horcrux, which in the ordinary way was bound eventually to die.

Of course, it is possible that he expected to be truly immortal by the time that happened.



And yet, John and his Scar-o-Vision filter looked awfully tempting about then.

According to the Scar-o-Vision reading (of which I only know the basic premise, and may have spun it off in an entirely different direction than John did), Albus realized after Tom's attempt to possess Harry in the MoM that Tom had figured out that the scar serves Harry as a warning system and that if he wanted to use the connection he will have to slide past it without setting it off.

Since he had been in and out of Harry's head all of year 5, and that Harry had not been having a year-long headache, he seems to have stumbled upon how to do so, he just may not



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have realized that it was *necessary*.

Ergo: throughout HBP Albus was always aware that Tom *might* tune back in, and hedged his bets by being very careful in all his statements; attempting to inform Harry without giving away how much he had figured out (or *when* he figured it out) to Tom — *if* Tom had tuned back in. That would certainly explain all of those weird statements from Albus that contradict the things we'd already learned. But, like I say, the theory is so broad it felt a bit like an attractively-baited trap.

And yet, it is certainly tempting. Particularly in view of things like the following:

Shall we have a little exercise in “parsing” the word according to Albus?

Regarding Albus's suggestion that the 6th Horcrux is Nagini.

'I don't think so,' said Dumbledore. I think I know what the sixth Horcrux is. I wonder what you will say when I confess that I have been curious for a while about the behavior of the snake, Nagini?'

Say what? Let's change the subject in the middle of the statement why don't we? This doesn't actually tell us that he really *does* believe the last Horcrux is Nagini, does it?

'The snake?' Said Harry, startled. *'You can use animals as Horcruxes?'*

'Well, it is inadvisable to do so,' said Dumbledore, 'because to confide a part of your soul to something that can think and move for itself is obviously a very risky business. However, if my calculations are correct, Voldemort was still at least one Horcrux short of his goal of six when he entered your parents' house with the intention of killing you.'



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'He seems to have reserved the process of making Horcruxes for particularly significant deaths. You would certainly have been that. He believed that in killing you, he was destroying the danger the prophecy had outlined. He believed he was making himself invincible. I am sure that he was intending to make his final Horcrux with your death.'

All quite useful and informative, and *seemed* certain to be important later, but damn-all to actually do with the snake isn't it? And still no claim that he truly believes his suggestion regarding the snake himself.

'As we know, he failed. After an interval of some years, however, he used Nagini to kill an old Muggle man, ...'

Which we already knew to be untrue. We witnessed Frank Bryce's murder and BabyMort killed the man himself, by magic, with his own wand. The snake just watched. Harry witnessed it too, and I'm pretty sure that he eventually had either told Albus about it himself, or he told Sirius who might have told Albus. (Otherwise, how would Albus know?)

Harry had certainly told Albus that the echo of Frank Bryce came out of the wand in the Priori Incantatum. Nagini, crawling around the graveyard, certainly had nothing to do with *that*.

'...and it might then have occurred to him to turn her into his last Horcrux.'

It might have occurred to him to run off to the La Scalla and embark on a new career as a counter-tenor, too, but he didn't do that either.

'...She underlines the Slytherin connection, which enhances Lord Voldemort's mystique. I think he is perhaps as fond of her as he can be of anything; he certainly likes



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to keep her close and he seems to have an unusual amount of control over her, even for a Parselmouth.'

True enough, and proof of nothing. Tom is an expert at holding others under his control. A mere snake, however large, would be child's play.

From this point Albus makes the odd statement here and there about the snake-as-Horcrux, just to make sure we don't forget. But never, never *once* does he actually come right out and tell us that; "Yes, I do believe the snake *IS* the Horcrux."

I thought that he was trying to lead Harry, and us, right up the garden path.

So, why?



Well, by the time DHs came out, I was less sure of that than I had been that the snake was NOT a Horcrux, but we might have gotten a hint the year before when Harry decided that he was the "weapon" Voldemort was after, and was planning to run away in order not to compromise the Order's secrets or endanger his friends. It was only Phineas, passing on Albus's orders, who managed to keep Harry from doing it. Albus would not have wanted a repeat of that incident.

It had also finally caught up to me that Albus's little disclaimer at the beginning of the series of Pensieve presentations, where he states grandly that we are leaving the realm of fact and certainly and entering into the misty marshes of memory and the (something, something) of wild speculation, is bound to be there for a reason.

Harry asks whether Albus believes his speculations are right,



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and Albus responds that of course *he* does, but that as he has pointed out before, he makes mistakes like any other man (and comments that his are likely to be bigger ones).

Does it now occur to anyone else that this is Rowling practically issuing a mission statement that something Harry was told over the course of those sessions is going to turn out to be wrong? Either inadvertently, or deliberately, but *wrong*.

Nagini-as-Horcrux was certainly a top candidate for that, but there were other possibilities as well.

But at that point I hadn't a clue of what the suggestion about the snake's real function was within the context of the story, and it read like a blatant case of a non-sequitur that's there "because the author says so." The 6th Horcrux was obviously Harry. The soul fragment is lodged in his skull just underneath the scar. I could not account for any good explanation for Harry's multiple connections to Tom without factoring in the probability that he was a Horcrux.

And there wouldn't be any problem finding that Horcrux, once they figure out what it is. Although figuring out what to *do* about it was likely to present a considerable puzzle.



Another thing this conversation with Harry seemed to be a clue to was that if we had any hope at all of solving this puzzle, we had to ask ourselves one overriding question: "What would Tom Riddle do?" And not let ourselves be distracted from the answer.

The indications we had at the time initially lead to the conclusion that Riddle created the first four of his Horcruxes comparatively quickly after the discussion with Slughorn. The



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majority of us believed that he had hidden all of the ones he had made by the time he returned from his first exile.

I was no longer quite so sure of that.

I was now inclined to believe that either he kept the ones he had by then in his own possession, or that he stashed them in a location known only to himself. Three of the ones that we know about were artifacts of sufficient interest and value to be kept for their own sakes. And kept on display to boot. Although there appears to be no indication inside the text of the books to suggest that he ever did so. But if he had, there was no reason for anyone to suspect that they were anything other than what they appeared. I suspected that the fourth, the unknown one, may have been in much the same vein. In any case, it would have been in the form of something that no one would question his possession of.

And while someone among his followers who knew about Horcruxes (which actually was at least somewhat unlikely, since just about all of his followers are either Riddle's own age or younger) might conceivably have theorized that one of his collection of artifacts might be one, they would hardly have leapt to the conclusion that they all were.



So: what would Tom Riddle do?

Well, what has Tom Riddle *done*?

At that point, most fans still believed he had created the Diary Horcrux before he turned 17 because the Diary Revenant told us that IT was put into the book when it was 16, and the Revenant had no obvious reason to be lying about the matter.



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Tom already had possession of the Ring by that time, so it wasn't much of a stretch to assume that he may not have wasted much time in creating the Diary, either.

He could have created the Ring first. In fact, I believe he unquestionably did. In fact I believe that it was the Ring that he created from Myrtle's death, not the Diary. At that point in time he was habitually *wearing* the Peverill ring. We do not know that he habitually carried the diary on his person. For that matter, Albus tells us that he no longer wore the Ring once it had become a Horcrux, and while Harry noticed Tom wearing an ugly gold ring with a black stone in the memory that he had retrieved from Slughorn, he never noticed anything like a ring being worn by the Diary Revenant.

And every scene that Harry was shown regarding Tom's former actions by that Revenant took place *after* Myrtle was safely dead.

Albus claims that's the reason he felt he could be so blasé about creating the Diary as a weapon as well as a safeguard. He already knew that he had at least one other Horcrux in reserve. (Hold that thought.)

But we didn't know that for certain. And from other indications it wasn't the most probable answer. He seems to have kept the Diary (either as a Horcrux or not) in his own possession longer than just about any of the others, so either it wasn't originally one of his Horcruxes, or he probably felt safe enough regarding it's security.

He made off with the Cup and the Locket (and the Ring) by the time he was 21 or thereabouts. Surely it didn't take him all 10 years to turn them into Horcruxes. He had almost certainly



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done so before he returned to the ww. Which was sometime around 1960 give or take 2–3 years.

At some point, probably before his return, he created another. By this time we know that one to have been the Diadem.

And then, in 1981, he at last decided to create his final one.

Why wait so long?

Well, Dumbledore did say that Tom Riddle liked to use artifacts of some grandeur — with a history and significance for his Horcruxes, preferably ones that had associations with the Founders (or with himself).

That supposition certainly appeared to be true at the end of HBP. Given a choice in the matter Tom will certainly use an artifact “of virtue.” And it is seems clear that he really did originally want to use Godric’s Sword, which he could only get at if he was in residence there at Hogwarts. But he doesn’t absolutely insist on that. The Diary was from someplace like Woolworth’s. It’s only discernible virtue was that it belonged to him, and contained many of his secrets. Actually, by this time, I rather think it contained all of his research and postulations related to Horcrux-creation.

I tend to be of the option that Tom had originally intended to create his Horcruxes from artifacts that were significant to *himself*. The Ring was directly connected to him and his family history, and his search for the locket (which he learned about at the same time as the ring) was for the same reason. I am convinced that his decision to hang around at Borgin & Burkes was part of an attempt to trace the Slytherin Locket, the existence of which he had learned of from his encounter with Morfin Gaunt.

Before DHs came out I rather thought that it was only when



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poor, silly Madam Smith waved Helga’s cup under his nose, that he decided to branch out and collect artifacts associated with all the *other* Founders as well. Now, of course, post-DHs we know that he may have already got the idea of *someday* collecting the whole set before he finished school, back when he managed to sweet-talk the story of the Ravenclaw diadem out of the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw. I have no idea what at that point he had considered using for a Hufflepuff artifact, and frankly I suspect neither had he.

Albus had also claimed that Tom liked to reserve the creation of Horcruxes for “significant” deaths. I’m even less convinced of the truth of this statement, and I remain so (Rowling seems to have completely jettisoned that train of thought, in any case). But for one of them, in fact, the last of them, I think Riddle did originally have a specific and, to him, highly significant death in mind. Which is what created his problem, and was responsible for that 20-year delay.

I suspect he may have wanted to use Godric’s sword for it, and with Albus in charge of the school, he couldn’t get at the sword.

He was also saving the creation of that particular Horcrux up for the murder of Albus Dumbledore.



Tom Riddle had committed three murders by means of the Avada Kedavra Curse at the age of 15. Albus tells us so directly. He committed these murders in the summer before his 5th year, which we know to be the case, for he stole the Peverill ring at the same time, and we saw him already wearing the ring in his



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interview with Slughorn, presumably during his 5th year, and he was already a Prefect.

Since the interview also appears to have taken place before the school was under attack by an unidentified monster, and the death of a student, we cannot be certain of when during his 5th academic year that discussion took place. But there is every possibility that it took place after the Christmas break, and he had already turned 16.

By the time of his return to the ww after his first 10-year exile, he had created at least 3 Horcruxes, the Ring, the Locket and the Cup. He had probably also created the Diadem.

Many fans have been assuming, on Rowling's say-so, that the murders of his father and his paternal grandparents probably accounted for three of these. But since the creation of the Horcrux appears to need to take place at the same time as the murder that creates it, this does not hold up to any rational examination. We do not know, apart from Myrtle Warren, whose deaths contributed to any of them, apart from the strong probability of that of Madam Smith being used for the creation of the Cup.

I now think (in defiance of Rowling's interview statement on the subject) that any assumptions associating the murder of the Riddles with Tom Riddle's Horcruxes are simply wrong.

Rowling never gave us any information on how one actually creates a Horcrux, beyond the fact that it is necessary to commit a murder to do it. Nor does she specify what type of a killing will split your soul. I was not convinced that just any sort of a kill even will do it. As I've stated in a number of places, killing other people may be required in the line of duty. It is



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the duty of a soldier in a shooting war to attempt to stop the enemy, up to and including killing him. The Harry Potter series is repeatedly referred to as the story of a war. Does a "duty" killing split your soul? Well, perhaps.

What about killing in self-defense? How about while defending someone else? Probably. Such splits can be mended by the application of a proper remorse, we are now told.

What about accidental killings? We can't be sure about those.

Say you fly into a rage and hit someone with a rock, in the heat of the moment, not necessarily intending to kill? What if you knock someone down and they manage to fall wrong and die of it? Yes, I can see it counting and remorse as a possible remedy.

But what about attempted killings that don't come off? The murderous intent was there. What if you poison someone with a slow-acting poison and they get help before it kills them? Throw an AK at them and miss? I don't really think that incompetence at murdering people should earn you a pass. This whole issue is far too mushy, too inexact. We cannot draw a solid conclusion from such waffle-waffle statements on the subject as we got from Slughorn. And the determining factor needs to be something other than *intent*. Using intent as your determining factor is mushy thinking.

I am not even convinced that the "official" version of Hepzibah Smith's death could be counted as a murder that Riddle himself, committed, for all that he was responsible for it. Not if it really happened the way it was reported. So far as anyone has ever been able to establish it was Hokey who actually poisoned the cocoa. Whether under Imperius, or a Confundus charm or not.



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If, that is, she was the one who actually did it.

Which raises the question; was Tom actually at Madam Smith's house that night? Did Tom poison her *himself* and plant a false memory in Hokey as he had done with Morfin Gaunt? That's certainly possible. It's the only way that *he* would have been able to create a Horcrux from that death, and for a wonder, I *do* believe Rowling when she tells us that the Cup was created as a Horcrux from the murder of Hepzibah Smith. Plus, we know that while Hokey *might* have poisoned her mistress, she certainly didn't steal the cup and the locket. I say Tom *was* there. Madam Smith would certainly have welcomed him, had he turned up there one evening, whether by prior arrangement or not. And turning Helga's cup into a Horcrux, using the death of one of Helga's descendants to do it would have certainly appealed to him.

Moaning Myrtle was killed by the Basilisk, which was simply behaving in accordance with its nature as a Basilisk. Riddle at the very least was responsible for the death, yes. But unless he had possessed her and forced her to **look** at the Basilisk (which I believe he did), we cannot with any certainty state that Myrtle was unquestionably slain "by his hand."

So unless that is indeed the case (and for the record I certainly believe that it was, much as Tom probably possessed Madam Smith and made her drink the poison), I am not convinced that Myrtle's death would otherwise have had any effect upon the integrity of his soul.

We might otherwise be completely justified in, for simplicity's sake, adopting the reading that only murders committed by some form of killing curse will split your soul. And that the split-



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ting of the caster's soul is an intrinsic part of why such curses are classified as Unforgivable. But frankly, I think that unlikely.

And that killing spiders, or for that matter, flies with an AK does not qualify.

Killing an Acromantula, which is sentient, *might*.

However, without the possession of the victim, a murder victim's death is unlikely to be capable of splitting a fragment of the murderer's soul off. It is the possession which appears to be the relevant factor, not any specific means of death.

Therefore; we might also postulate that in order to split *your* soul, you have to kill something that *has* a soul. And the victim has to actually *die*. Throwing a curse with lousy aim and shattering rocks with it doesn't split your soul, no matter how murderous your intent might be..

And if Rowling means something else, then she needs to explain it to us. In detail.



The purpose of AK is to kill its target. There may be a perfectly good, entirely justifiable, reason to want to kill a target. And that target does not have to be human. It only has to be living. All living things will one day die. To hasten a death prematurely may be deplorable, and it may be wrong, but it is not unnatural.

Ergo: The Avada Kedavra Curse does not inherently split the soul into separate bits.

ETA: and we are still overlooking the fact that Peter Pettigrew had to be present when the Nagini-Horcrux was created, let alone have been involved in creating the BabyMort homunculus.



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That's hardly what I would call a magical nonentity. Indeed, he seems to be one of the most accomplished Dark wizards in canon.

By the way, I humbly extended my apologies to any correspondents who had earlier contended that the creation of a Horcrux had to take place at the same time as the murder that made it, for having originally pooh-poohed their theory. They are right. I was wrong.

Or so I am finally convinced. If Rowling still claims that the deaths of the Riddles had anything to do with any of the Horcruxes, Rowling is wrong. She never bothered to work out the issue of how Horcruxes are made, so I say that she flatly doesn't know. All that mattered from where she was standing is that they had *been* made. She didn't *care* how.



Consequently: we need to reconsider the assumption (and Rowling's claim) that Tom used the murder of his father to create his first Horcrux. Or that the Diary was the first Horcrux. He certainly didn't create the Diary from the death of Moaning Myrtle, Rowling notwithstanding.

The Diary Horcrux was already such a bundle of "experimental" magic that it may seem premature to dismiss the possibility. But it really doesn't look very likely. Not now that we can figure out a bit more about the matter.

Rowling had Albus inform us that Tom killed the Riddles the summer of "his 16th year". (i.e., the summer *before* he turned 16. As she would well know if she had ever learned to count.)

He was already wearing the Peverill ring when he asked Slughorn about Horcruxes. But although he was wearing the



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Ring in that interview, he was not yet wearing his "elegantly wasted" appearance. And Albus assures us that he couldn't bear to wear the Ring after he had turned it into a Horcrux.

What now raises a much bigger issue, is the question of how Tom managed to create a Horcrux *at Hogwarts* while he was still underage, off of everyone's radar.

Or, for that matter, how he managed to murder the Riddles while still under the Trace.

Because even Dumbledore, who probably knew even more about Horcruxes than Riddle did, and had already been told that Riddle wrote in that Diary when he was 16 still tells Harry that he doesn't think Riddle committed any murders between those of his father and grandparents in the summer of 1942 and that of Hepzibah Smith roughly five years later. (Providing yet another temptation to apply that Scar-o-Vision filter.)

Unless Albus was just being obnoxiously literal and fudging the truth again, which would be perfectly in character. He may not be willing to admit to knowing there was a murder if he cannot put an actual name to it. And he is clearly not counting the death of Moaning Myrtle. Probably because she was unquestionably killed by the Basilisk.

However, if creating a Horcrux is known to cause a physical effect upon the creator's appearance, then Albus must, at the very least, have been retroactively suspicious of Riddle's "elegantly wasted" appearance during his interview with Madam Smith. Or, indeed, quite possibly by the time he sat his NEWTs. Tom would have probably have gone a long way toward developing that particular appearance over the two years before he finished Hogwarts.



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But that still does not mean that the Horcrux Tom had created by that point was the Diary. He already had possession of the Ring. Which Harry did *not* see him wearing in his interview with Madam Smith.

From where I'm standing, I disbelieve the majority line of reasoning mainly because for various reasons gone into here and elsewhere, I do not think that the Diary was one of his early Horcruxes. The Diary was specifically created as a weapon. One which could be deployed at long distance. We have been given no indication of why Riddle should believe that he would need such a weapon, until, say, after he was aware of the Trelawney Prophecy. And until his visit to Hepzibah Smith, when he was around 21, the only other one of the artifacts that we now know beyond doubt that he used to create Horcruxes from, that he had in his possession at the relevant time, was the Peverill ring. At that point in his career, he wasn't shedding soul fragments and making Horcruxes at random, after all.

And the more you think about it, the less likely it seems that Tom could have created another Horcrux, off the map, while he was still being monitored for underage sorcery. After he was of age, out of school, working in Knockturn Alley, and on his own is another matter.

Or, Rowling is right and Myrtle's death *did* produce the first Horcrux, and the first one was the Ring. Tom did indeed create it by taking possession of her and forcing her to look at the Basilisk — which would not have registered as a spell, even if his wand had been subjected to a *Priori Incantatum* immediately afterward, because he was able to do all of that wandlessly. It took some time afterwards for any physical manifestation of a

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split soul to become evident, for the Diary Revenant certainly shows little sign of it. It was anything up to five years after Myrtle's death that his interview with Madam Smith took place. And for all we know, those physical manifestations could have been from messing with other aspects of the Dark Arts.

The only thing that stands in the way of this reading is the Diary Revenant's statement that *it* had been put into the book when Riddle was 16..

Well, the *memories* of what had happened back in 1943 *had* been. There is no question about that. Riddle was 16 when he recorded those events in that diary. There is certainly no indication that he had ever taken the trouble to fish those memories *out*.

But any number of memories from May–June of 1943 are the soul fragment which turned the diary into a Horcrux. The fragment should have had its *own* memories. *Later* memories. Even if only from later in 1943. Hold that thought.



It is just possible that my extrapolation in the 'Minding the Gap' essay could be on the right track and that Tom had somehow managed to get himself removed from the Trace over the summer of '42. We never heard of any kind of official "Trace" prior to DHs (for all that *something* set of an alert from Dobby's wandless hover spell back in CoS). The whole business of the Trace was a piece of inexcusably lazy explanation in itself, and one that raises far more questions than it answers.

Harry's warning notices in CoS and OotP both identified the spell and place of occurrence, and were delivered to Harry as the nearest known wizard to those locations. They did not

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identify the wizard or the wand which had actually cast the spell. (Or if, indeed, the spell had even been cast using a wand. Wouldn't you think that a wandless spell might more probably have registered as a burst of accidental magic? Hover spells are fairly common forms of accidental magic. A sudden flurry of warnings over something that could be a burst of accidental magic sounds totally inappropriate). If Riddle had used his wand to split his soul, commit a murder, and created his first Horcrux somewhere well away from any of his known haunts, would the blame have fallen upon somebody else in the area? Riddle has established a pattern of doing that sort of thing when he is working independently. But I still doubt he could have done it, using his own wand, while he was personally being monitored for underage sorcery. He used Morfin's to kill the Riddles.

It certainly wasn't Myrtle's death that created the Diary Horcrux anyway (despite what Rowling has to say about it). The Revenant effectively tells us that Riddle did not do anything until after Hagrid was expelled. Which was some time after Myrtle was killed. And every one of the visions that the Diary Revenant shows us took place *after* her death. I seriously doubt that even Tom himself could have continued to enter data into that diary after it had already been converted into a Horcrux. Ergo; it was still a *diary* at least until the end of his 5th school year.



Which reminds us: the whole subject of Horcruxes is banned at Hogwarts.

Had already been banned before Albus became Headmaster



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or Riddle ever started asking about them.

So where did Riddle learn how to create one?

Where did he even learn enough to decide to ask Slughorn about them?

And no, I don't accept Rowling's lame-arsed attempt at a retrofit by pretending that Sluggy was lying, and the books were just sitting right there in the Restricted Section until Albus became Headmaster.

Well, a fan by the name of Felicity on the old Hogwarts-Professor.com forum made a particularly good suggestion. In the Room of Requirement, in its aspect as the Room of Hidden Things Harry notes:

There were thousands and thousands of books, no doubt stolen or graffitied or banned.

Tom had discovered a lot of the castle's secrets by the end of his first year as a Prefect. Or even earlier. The entrance to the Chamber of Secrets, little Aragog, probably more than one of the hidden tunnels out of the castle, it isn't too much of a stretch to suspect that he may have discovered the Room of Hidden Things as well. In fact, at this end of the series we can now be sure that he had, at some point. He was all over the Castle for his first five years looking for the entrance to Salazar's Chamber of Secrets. And Tom is the sort of boy who might very well have wanted to hide something, himself, in any case.

Riddle may have discovered the term "Horcrux" in the same book that Hermione later found that one remaining reference to them. But that book does not go into the subject. It does not even define the term.

He *seems* to have learned what a Horcrux is from Horace



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Slughorn. But he did not learn from Slughorn how to create one.

However, Slughorn did also drop the information that the subject of Horcruxes is banned at Hogwarts. This information was probably not the deterrent that poor old Horace had intended it to be.

He had inadvertently told Tom exactly where he needed to go to find the information he wanted.



Of course there are any number of other possibilities in play as well. We were told that Tom always spent the summer break at his orphanage. But by the time he was asking Dippet to let him stay at school for the summer he was already 16 and the probability is that now that he was old enough to legally work for a living, his orphanage wouldn't have accepted him back on any consideration. And for that matter, he may have been shown the door any time up to a couple of years earlier. We have no information on what he did with himself over the summers after that. One possibility may be found in the essay entitled; 'Minding the Gap' in the Missed Opportunities sub-collection.

But, even at the age of 11 Tom informs us that he was in the habit of roaming about London unsupervised. And from the age of 11 he knew how to get into Diagon Alley. Where he could have met up with anyone from school.

And many of his schoolmates came from families with private libraries.

I rather suspect that Tom could have managed to garner an invitation to visit a schoolmate, or series of schoolmates, during any summer, if he chose to, and didn't have other obligations.



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Or to have just gone home with any of them for tea after a "chance" meeting in Diagon — or Knockturn — Alley. Such meetings would be even more easily arranged if he was actually working in one of the shops over the summer. Many of his classmates would have considered it an honor to get some personal time with clever Tom. And such visits would have been quite untraceable a few years later, once Dumbledore was trying to follow Tom's backtrail.

And even later, as an employee of Borgin and Burkes, he may have had reason to pay calls on old schoolmates on behalf of his employers, many of whose families may well have patronized the shop. Some of them on a fairly regular basis. The Blacks, for example, were even related by marriage to the founder's family. No, going to work for B&B was definitely not a waste of Tom Riddle's time or talents.

And, after all, if Regulus Black, before he was even out of school, was able to figure out that Lord Voldemort had ensured his immortality by creating a Horcrux, it stands to reason that he had access to that kind of information, too. In fact he probably needed to do no more than look it up in his own family's library at #12.

Not that Rowling bothered to allow anyone to follow that lead.



Which also raises the long-standing, low-level nagging question of why Tom even *had* that diary. Why, after all, would Tom Riddle have had a Muggle diary with him in which to record the events of the later half of his 5th year?

Was he already in the habit of keeping a diary? I suppose



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he could have been. But we hadn't been given any particular reason to believe so. Frankly, in retrospect, the diary reads as something that Rowling suddenly pulled out of her hat for her own convenience.

Most fans assume that he went out and bought it, or stole it, as soon as he returned to London and immediately put his memories of the previous year into it.

But I am not at all sure that really plays. The Diary Revenant was able to take Harry into his memory to show him what he wanted — to the very day.

That does not sound like a random retrofit. It sounds more as if the events of that year had already been recorded day-by-day as they happened.

And then were concealed later, leaving the appearance of a blank book.

For that matter, the whole diary functioned as a *Pensieve*, and that doesn't sound like a random retrofit, either.

Post-HBP, we had also discovered the existence of Morfin Gaunt, and discovered that Tom had a track record of dabbling in memory modification. I now think that the diary may have been an experiment in *memory storage*.

I think that his on-the-fly experience of tampering with his uncle Morfin's memory, the previous summer, had given Tom ideas, and he bought or lifted a couple of diaries from the local Woolworth's to experiment with in his following year at Hogwarts. He couldn't have known in advance that this was going to be the year that he would strike gold regarding the Chamber of Secrets, but, when he did, it enhanced the value of the 1943 volume immeasurably. It was like encountering a



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once-in-a-lifetime event when you actually manage to have a loaded camera with you.



The next toppling domino to hit me on the head was the realization that the Diary was probably not the first Horcrux at all; it was the fifth one. He made that one primarily as a weapon, and he didn't make it until he decided he *needed* that particular weapon. i.e., he produced the diary as a *diary* — which is to say, as a functional paper Pensieve — in 1943, but he created the Diary as a *Horcrux* in more like 1981.

When you stop and think about it, Harry caught a flash of Lord Voldemort's red eyes in the face of young Tom Riddle down there in the Chamber.

Young Tom Riddle didn't have red eyes at the age of 16. The memories which gave the Revenant its *form* were those of the 16-year-old Riddle, but there is no reason to assume that the fragment of soul that informed it would have been. If the Diary wasn't created until 1981, then the fragment of soul that fueled it would have been the 54-year-old Riddle at the height of his powers (small wonder he found 11-year-old Ginny Weasley such a bore). And the Diary Revenant would have had every reason to lie to Harry Potter about that.

If I am right, by the time Lord Voldemort created the Diary as a weapon, he already knew about the existence of Harry Potter. *And* the Prophecy related to him. And whatever he didn't know about what had happened afterwards Ginny had filled him in on.

Since the Horcrux was incorporated so much later, the Diary



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Revenant may even have retained some hazy recollection of it's original much older source's actions and intentions right up to the year of his defeat, well after the dates that the memories from which it had formed it's appearance had been put into the book. This is not certain, for by any comparison the fragment in Harry certainly seems to have no recollection of *its* former existence. But I seriously doubt that 16-year-old Riddle's eyes were ever red, regardless of what kind of light he was in. So, it may just be safer to consider that anything the Revenant has to say about *what* happened *when* may be thoroughly compromised and not to be taken for granted as being the truth.

Which makes it all really very much simpler, all round. It also removes all of the time constraints over just when Tom Riddle learned how Horcruxes are made, or explaining how he managed to make one while he was still being monitored for underage sorcery.

It also may explain the reason for why the Diary was so much saner than the Locket. The Diary had been dumped into a variant of a Pensieve. With memories, complete with all the memories' images and sounds to inhabit. It may have been trapped in one specific year of its creator's past for something like 11 years, but it wasn't necessarily altogether sensory-deprived.



What this possibility raises instead is the question of; when did *Tom* discover how effectively one of his Horcruxes would reach out and try to take possession of someone? Even if the book that Hermione later stole from Dumbledore's office mentions that, it seems to claim that first the victim has to have



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become *attached* to it.

After all, to specifically *DO* that was the whole point of creating that Diary Horcrux.

We may also need to consider the fact that the Diary took care to Obliviate its little host(ess) after each use in order to string out the situation as long as it could. How did it know to do *that*? It really doesn't come across as something that 16-year-old Tom would have spared a thought for.

And for that matter, the Diary didn't just reach out and grab people at random. It only reached out and tried to get a grip on the people who *wrote* in it.

By the time it was turned into a Horcrux, Tom had given it an interactive interface. Possibly to limit its focus to only *one* victim. Or, only one at a time.

16-Year-old Tom would have probably never thought to do that, *either*. He never would have anticipated anyone using it but himself. And 16-year-old Tom Riddle wouldn't yet have known that his Horcruxes would be exceptionally grabby.



Well, we do have a couple of possibilities for when Tom might have discovered the general "grabiness" of his Horcruxes. In HBP Albus tells us that Tom discovered that after he had turned it into a Horcrux he didn't care to wear the Ring any more.

I'm not quite sure how that works. Neither does Rowling evidently, since she discretely buried the whole line of inquiry under the Dumbledore backstory when she finally got around to writing DHs. I mean, how do you notice that you are trying to take control over yourself? From outside? Even better, explain



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to me please how exactly *Albus Dumbledore* is supposed to have discovered that. But we'll just have to let that pass.

It's a lot easier for me to believe that Tom created the Ring and hid it in the ruins of the Gaunt hovel as a traveler's insurance policy just before leaving on his trip to Albania, and that Albus is talking through his hat. Indeed, by that point in time, Tom may have deliberately cursed that Ring, and left it there specifically as an Albus trap. Or, more likely, a Morfin trap. I really rather do suspect that the story of Albus Dumbledore agitating for Morfin Gaunt's release from Azkaban may have got out into the papers by that time, and suggested to Tom that he ought to leave the country until things cooled off.

A rather more interesting possibility turned up under one of the rocks that Swythiv and I kicked over in the course of our extended e-mail discussion:

It really does seem evident that once Tom knew that there was a Prophecy out there related to his downfall, he started separately hiding the Horcruxes that he had previously stashed together. Admittedly the Diadem seems to have been stowed in the 7th floor storage room at Hogwarts as early as his return to Britain, and we have no idea as to why — apart from the convenience of the author. Unless it was the Diadem which actually anchored his curse on the DADA position. And I have no idea how that was supposed to work if that's the case.

The Ring, as I say, I believe had been hidden in the Gaunt hovel since some time around 1947 or '48. But the Locket only went into the sea cave around 1980, the Diary was handed to Lucius in '81, and Tom had entrusted the Cup to Bellatrix somewhere around the same period.



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Uh-oh.

I've suddenly got a bad, bad feeling about that.

Bellatrix. Add Horcrux, shake well.

Good lord, she'd have rolled over for it in a New York minute. Talk about getting *attached* to the damned things. And by that time the fragment in the bloody Cup wouldn't have been even remotely sane.

That one wasn't deliberately built as a weapon. It wouldn't have tried to conceal its intentions or Obliviate its effects. It would have simply reached out, grabbed her, and taken her over. And she would have been delighted to serve as its vessel. To be as one with her Master? To BE her Master? That's her idea of paradise. ("He shares *everything* with me!")

Is that what's actually wrong with Bella? She *enjoyed* being possessed by Tom, and wants it back? His lack of any sort of respect for any social contract may have struck her as *enormously* liberating. And she keeps trying to get close enough to him for him to do it again. And it's the *last* thing he intends to do.

Because I cannot see that Tom would have been best pleased by that development. Amused, perhaps, but I don't think he'd have found that development either convenient or discrete. And he sure the hell wouldn't have welcomed a potential dopelganger right in the middle of his organization. Not to mention that it completely blew the whole "secret" of what that Cup he'd entrusted to her was right out of the water. In retrospect, it has been obvious since GoF that Bellatrix *definitely* knows about *that* particular Horcrux.



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I had earlier speculated that he'd given Bella the Locket and told her to put it in the cave. But Rowling didn't choose to go there. And this line of inquiry is shaping up to be an extremely worthy alternate.

I think that once he managed to make it turn her loose — for they don't seem to take their hosts over 24/7, or not at first — he gave her instructions to put it away somewhere that it wouldn't be in contact with her. I would imagine that his instructions to Bella were so emphatic that she didn't dare to remove the Cup from the vault even after he disappeared.

But the incident could have been enough to set him to thinking over the possibilities of creating one that was specifically *designed* to take someone over. And he'd deal with the consequences once he'd got what he wanted out of the situation.

To wit: the death of Albus Dumbledore.



Of course what this whole line of speculation does is to give the stupid "One Ring" behavior of the Locket some legitimacy after all. Which I honestly cannot view as a Good Thing. But those are the breaks. *This* is an acceptable trade.

But it still doesn't explain Umbridge's apparent immunity. That's still a loose end, dangling, twisting in the wind. Like I say, there are just too many contradictions and bits of illogic scattered through the whole issue of Tom Riddle and his Horcruxes to be able to ever draft out anything like a Unified Theory of Everything which would actually be able to take all of it into account. Rowling rewrote the rules at least once too often for that.

But the presence on site of a determinedly grabby Horcrux



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might explain something of the atmosphere of #12 over the course of OotP. That locket had been sitting there in the display case in the parlor since 1980. And when Sirius threw it out, Kreacher had immediately pulled it out of the rubbish bin and hid it in his nest. So it was still there in the house. And now it was even closer to the kitchen where everyone tended to gather. I expect that, Molly Weasley's cooking notwithstanding, moping, sulking and squabbling rapidly became the order of the day.

To say nothing of 16 years of exposure to it on Kreacher's part.

Mundungus Fletcher didn't take the damned thing out of the house until after Sirius was dead and the Order had cleared out.

But if it was going to possess anyone in that time it would have been Kreacher, and it didn't. But then, I'm not sure that House Elves *can* be possessed by the souls of wizards. It would interfere with their geas to serve.

Although there is the fact that Kreacher hadn't cleaned anything in a decade, isn't there?

Nor do we know how long Walburga Black had been acting like her portrait.

I think old Arcturus had a lucky escape when he decided to move in with his daughter.

It might be relevant to keep that factor in mind when re-examining Sirius's steady decline in mental stability over the course of the year he was effectively in house arrest, and also to reflect upon Walburga's last five years in that house alone with only Kreacher — and that Locket.



Well this looks like as good a stopping point as any.



Horcrux Redux, Yet Again

Continuing with our historical survey of the explorations on the possibilities regarding the Horcruxes, mostly written after HBP, once we knew we were going to have to be dealing with them.



By the end of HBP I thought there was some question as to whether Voldemort had figured out what, or rather, who his final Horcrux was. I rather suspected that he may have by that point in the series.

He did know that he had succeeded in losing another piece of his soul, anyway.

For despite all of his statements in the graveyard about being willing enough to get his “old” body back — until he could manage a truly immortal one (a statement that Rowling had been determinedly ignoring ever since, but I that I still suspected we might not have heard the end of), he had not yet got a good *look* at that regenerated body. But he already knew it wasn’t the **same** as his previous body.

After all, the first thing he did after rising from the cauldron and dressing himself was a detailed self-examination. Harry watched him run his hands over himself, arms, chest, face, he would have been able to tell from the changes to his physiology that — despite the spell having gone awry 13 years earlier — he had still split off another soul fragment since the night of his defeat. This was not the first time he had gone through this procedure, remember? He knew the kind of changes to expect.

With that in mind, it belatedly occurred to me that this may have been the purpose of Rowling’s having him create a Horcrux from his snake. That would serve to mask any physical changes



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attendant upon having succeeded in creating the Harrycrux at Godric’s Hollow. In this, I think I may have been giving her far too much credit. She never had managed to keep proper track of that sort of detail, and she certainly wasn’t likely to start then.

(Although to be honest, at that point I was still determinedly resisting such a daft idea as that the last Horcrux was the Snake.)

Still, given Rowling’s insistence that Nagini was indeed an additional Horcrux, Riddle would have been able to account for having lost another soul fragment since Godric’s Hollow, despite the monumental screw-up which had destroyed his original body there.

The fact that Tom, according to Albus, had allegedly gone to the Potters’ *intending* to create a Horcrux also suggests that he would have taken an artifact of significance with him.

Rowling completely failed to follow through on this thread in her DHs flashback. I am now inclined to believe that she’d completely forgotten that she’d had Albus tell us anything of the sort. But that does not prove that there never was any such artifact. Getting inside Tom’s head does not automatically reveal the truth of his past actions. Only what he chooses to recollect now. Sixteen years later, en route to Godric’s Hollow again, he wasn’t thinking about any artifact. He was fully occupied with the prospect of finally murdering his appointed enemy. And, apparently, fantasizing about how it was *supposed* to have worked the first time. Actual events? *Fugeddaboutit!*

Pausing for a moment in this particular “scenic view spot”; one needs to stop and pick and choose what version of the matter you are going to believe.

So. Do you believe that Harry did, in fact, become a Hor-



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crux? We weren't given any way of believing that he was *not* with the way that the story played out, were we?

So, then. Do you think Lord Voldemort *intended* to create a living Horcrux from a child which had been prophesied to "vanquish" him? Why on earth would he choose to do that? He *fully* intended to kill that child. And to "immortalize" the event.

The very fact that a soul fragment was left *in the child* makes it abundantly clear that to create a Horcrux was a part of that evening's agenda. You *don't* stuff bits of your soul into people you intend to kill *by accident*.

So *of course* he took an artifact with him. Then. We have no idea what it was, and neither does Rowling. She might even have dodged the issue by pretending there was no such artifact because she couldn't think of one.

Therefore, I thought his first assumption might have been that the designated artifact was now his 6th Horcrux. Or that there wasn't a Horcrux at all. That in fact the split-off soul fragment had simply been lost when his spell was derailed.



If he had not paid a visit to Godric's Hollow since that discovery — and he may not have (ETA: well, he obviously *did*, but apparently he just went there to set and bait the Bagshott trap), it isn't exactly the scene of one of his triumphs — I thought he may have decided to leave the artifact in place, or had simply assumed that it had already been found and removed.

I had speculated that Harry and his friends might very well find it there. And that it might have a curse on it, although that was far from certain, but that it would not be a Horcrux.



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Harry is the Horcrux. And that even if they did find an artifact, Harry and his friends were primed to believe that it *couldn't* be a Horcrux, since the last one, acto Dumbledore, was the Snake.

In any case, I thought this artifact might turn out to be the as yet unspecified Ravenclaw or Gryffindor artifact — assuming there was any such thing. Or that it might be just something otherwise old and suitably impressive.

Conversely, Voldemort might have already retrieved the artifact. Which raised the question of whether Voldemort can tell by touch or sight whether or not an artifact actually has become a Horcrux. (Given that his Horcruxes now all tend to reach back, I suspect he might.) Still, Harry had no reaction from handling the Diary, apart from a vague feeling of familiarity when he read the name written on it. Prior to all Horcruxes suddenly acting like the One Ring in DHs, Voldemort might have thought he had taken possession of his final Horcrux, and had only recovered an artifact.

Swythyv, the theorist who pointed out the possibility that Reggie may have faked his death and gotten the Horcrux out of the cave *after* Voldemort's first defeat also floated the suggestion that Tom Riddle may have lifted his mystery artifact from Borgin and Burkes' shop before his disappearance, Obliviating his employers' memories of having ever had it, and falsifying the shop's records. This is certainly a viable possibility. It would also be in character. Tom was already a thief long before he became a murderer. And I would suspect that, given long enough, just about any magical artifact of significance might well cross the threshold of B&B. That's probably one of the reasons why Tom chose to work there in the first place.



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However, when Lord Voldemort took physical and psychic possession of Harry Potter in the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic at the end of Year 5, the way he had possessed Quirrell a few years earlier, he got a nasty surprise, and probably now realizes that there is something that he had totally *not* anticipated about the Potter boy, and his scar. Dumbledore claims that Voldemort found the attempt at possession so painful that he has taken steps to close off the connection from the other end. Harry can hardly confirm or deny this since he was in such agony at the time himself that he was aware of nothing else.

But Voldemort certainly hit *something* he absolutely DID NOT expect, and he is (or once was) quite clever enough to have put 2+2 together, if it had occurred to him to try. But we didn't know at the end of OotP whether that was the case.

However, he certainly didn't restrain himself from creating his final Horcrux for some 20 years on the off chance that there might someday be a Prophecy out there with his name on it. I still think that he had been reserving that last Horcrux for one specific murder. One that up to 1981 he *still* had not yet figured out a workable, risk-free way to accomplish.

As I say, I think he was saving up that one for the death of Albus Dumbledore.



I still believe that, you know. Even some fifteen years and counting after the closing of canon.

I think that Riddle returned to the ww from his first exile to discover that his long-range plans had suffered an unexpected set-back. Actually, he may have had a couple of plans regarding



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the school already in train, and neither had materialized. The first showed no signs of materializing at all. His back-up plan was also a washout.



Which raises the question: what could have been Tom's original plan regarding the castle? The one that didn't materialize at all?

Well, by this time I'm no longer sure that there ever really was such a plan, given that I now believe that I have convincing evidence to conclude that the diary hadn't been made into a Horcrux until well after 1943. Possibly not until something like 1981. But there is still a hint of one in canon. Once again, I have a correspondent to thank. As well as my fellow traveler, Swythiv. My correspondent pointed out the following passage from CoS, which I had overlooked:

"I knew it wouldn't be safe to open the Chamber again while I was at school. But I wasn't going to waste those long years I'd spent searching for it. I decided to leave behind a diary, preserving my sixteen-year-old self in its pages, so that one day, with luck, I would be able to lead another in my footsteps, and finish Salazar Slytherin's noble work."

Er... leave *behind* a diary?

Perhaps he didn't make that appointment in order to get access to the castle just for the sake of hiding the Diadem. Perhaps he also made that trip in order to retrieve his diary. All he would have needed to do would be to get into range and cast Accio diary! Harry was able to summon his broom all the way from Gryffindor tower to the edge of the forest in GoF.

However, that passage also suggests that even Rowling seems



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to believe that the Diary was made into a Horcrux by Myrtle's death. Although internal examination of the text thoroughly refutes that possibility. He was still entering data into that diary *after* Myrtle's death. I don't think a Horcrux, even one with a user interface, would have let him continue to do that.

Particularly not if he couldn't even go on wearing the Ring because the fragment kept trying to re-integrate.

It was also Swthyv who pointed out to me the interesting "coincidence" (which I suspect might have been no coincidence) that when Harry and Ron found the Diary in Moaning Myrtle's loo, Ron immediately started burbling on about book traps, such as the book one **could not** stop reading, or 'SONNETS OF A SORCERER' which would force you to speak in limericks for the rest of your life.

We can't really know for sure, but from the Diary Revenant's claim. It does certainly sound like the diary *always* was intended to serve as a weapon. It may not have been a Horcrux yet (and I am now convinced it probably wasn't) at that early point, but it could still have been a trap. I also don't think the Diary Revenant had yet taken up residence at that point in its history, but it was stuffed full of a year's worth of Tom's memories, and ripe for mischief.

But that's a possibility that I don't really think plays very well. I think the Revenant was talking about **its** mission. And the Revenant wasn't *in* that Diary until it became a Horcrux. And that wasn't until well after Tom had finished school.

We don't really have any clue about how any such trap may have originally been set up to work, either. Which is another reason I am not convinced that there was anything of the sort. But it is at least possible that if a book can make you talk in lim-

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ericks ever after, one could make you hiss a set phrase in Parseltongue to the water taps. That's all it would have taken to set the Basilisk running amok (which may have been the whole point of this hypothetical plan). And the kid with the book certainly would be the first one to die.

I daresay that Tom might have been quite happy to have let the Diary take some child over in his absence and to have returned to the ww to find the school closed and the Basilisk in residence, making it possible for him to simply move in without much fanfare. But I still suspect that he decided to make sure that when it did, it would be at his convenience.

But, as I say, by this time, I just think the Diary Revenant was just boasting. We can probably dismiss the thread of Tom's having left the diary as a booby trap for the unwary.

Although it might have been a fun thread to follow. Maybe in a fanfic.



The following may have been his back-up plan:

And this one seems a good deal more likely.

When he dodged out of Britain to Albania he had no idea that it was going to take him anything like a decade to find the dratted diadem.

He had expected Professor Dippet to still be Headmaster when he returned

He had expected Professor Dippet to give him the DADA position when he asked for it.

Once established at Hogwarts as the DADA instructor, he would have set up one of his Byzantine plots to murder Albus

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Dumbledore and create a Horcrux from his death. (Having kept at least one slot open in reserve for that purpose.) He would then have either kept the whole set with him, or hidden that Horcrux — and possibly all the others — in the castle. (Or, conversely, he might have seen to it that they were “discovered” and put on display for all to admire as relics of the Founders.) He would have jockeyed his way into taking Dumbledore’s place as Deputy Headmaster and simply waited for Dippet to die. And then he would be in charge of Hogwarts castle. As he had intended to be for years.

Instead, he found that Dippet was already dead, or retired, and that Dumbledore was now Headmaster.

He knows that there is No Way that he is ever going to be given a teaching position in Dumbledore’s school.

He has to revise his plans.

Completely.

But he doesn’t necessarily give them up.



Which at long last raises a question put to me late in 2019 by yet another correspondent, about where Tom had stashed his Horcruxes before he started parceling them out to trusted followers for safekeeping. After all, it’s not like he had a known place of residence where he kept them together under his own eye.

And once raised, that turns out to be quite a question, too. One which connects back to the mystery of that pair of vanishing cabinets in Hogwarts, and in London. For over a dozen years, I’d assumed that the London cabinet had reached the shop by way of Belvina Burke *née* Black, who had still been alive until 1962.



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In that case, it would have only been put on display in B&B well after the period of time that Tom is known to have worked there.

But what if it wasn’t. What if it had already been in the Burke family’s possession when Tom had been employed there?

Burke isn’t likely to have displayed that cabinet without knowing what it was. Not unless it was on display in his own family’s quarters, or in the stock room. After all, he isn’t really likely to have been able to sell it as part of a paired set unless he had *both* cabinets. It’s only use is as furniture unless you have the complete set.

And, indeed, by Harry’s day, it seems to be being used only as furniture. Even before the Hogwarts cabinet was damaged by Peeves. By the 1990s it seems likely that B&B had given up on being able to get possession of the Hogwarts cabinet. May not have known that the other cabinet was even *at* Hogwarts.

We have no real clue about which former member of the staff the Hogwarts cabinet had originally belonged to, but clearly it had belonged to someone on the staff. And clearly there was a problem with their estate which kept B&B from being able to take possession of it. In return, they probably refused to part with the London cabinet, had Hogwarts tried to claim it.

My original assumption that it had been Headmaster Phineas Nigelus Black’s emergency route home to London, might be completely out in left field. After all, such cabinets had been going in and out of fashion since some time in the 18th century.

I’ve speculated for years that Tom turned the Peverill ring into a Horcrux, cursed it, and planted it in the ruins of the Gaunt hovel as an Albus trap (although it was far more likely intended to take his uncle Morfin out of the picture before Tom’s failing



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memory charm could create any further difficulties for Tom), and also as a piece of “traveler’s insurance” before heading off to the wilds of Albania in search of the Ravenclaw diadem.

Most of us have speculated that Tom set up that job interview with Albus as a pretext to hiding the Diadem at Hogwarts. That speculation is clearly not altogether wrong. The Diadem could have only got there after his return from abroad.

But there may have been more to that interview than just that.

Let’s ask another question; what if Tom had already been aware of the properties of the vanishing cabinets back when he was working for Burke?

When Harry started at Hogwarts, the as yet undamaged Hogwarts cabinet had still been on display in a public area. What if that was also the case in Tom’s day. And what if the shop records pertaining to the London cabinet included the activation spell for transport between the two cabinets.

So — just for the sake of theorizing — let us give this a bit of thought. A Diadem is not a small item that you can carry in your pocket without detection. Yes, wizards can conceal things magically, but Albus Dumbledore is a wizard that it is fairly difficult to slip things past. Tom seems not to have quite managed it on any consistent basis.

So, let’s try this on for size; Tom set up that interview in order to get into the castle and determine whether the Hogwarts cabinet was still present, and where in the castle it was situated. Once he was on site, a simple ‘point me’ charm would do that.

Had he actually been given the job he was asking for, I am fairly confident that he would have had the cabinet moved into his own quarters. And probably purchased the London cabinet

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in order to keep control of it.

In the absence of future employment at Hogwarts, I think he still managed to get access to the London cabinet, and snuck back to the castle at a time that most of the students were away for winter break and the staff was otherwise occupied, and put the Diadem in the Room of Hidden Things —

— Along with the Cup and the Locket, which he had stashed there for safety *before* leaving the country in search of the Diadem.

I daresay he had also wanted to get into the castle in order to check on them. Had they been found during his absence, they would most probably have been put on display, either in the Trophy room, or in the Slytherin and Hufflepuff common rooms as treasures of the school. Not knowing of Albus’s interest in Hepzibah Smith’s murder, he would be fairly confident of their not having been removed from the castle, even if they had been found.

He was easily able to determine that they had not been found in his absence, so he left them in place, adding the battered Diadem to the collection.

And at some point, close to 20 years later, after hearing about the prophecy, he retrieved the Cup and the Locket and made arrangements to hide them separately.



The diary, on the other hand, I think he had kept with him. It wasn’t a Horcrux yet, but it was a fairly impressive example of experimental magic. I also think that in its original form, it contained all of his research and experimental notes regard-

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ing the creation of Horcruxes, and he had updated it as he had advanced that study, even beyond the date printed on the cover. I don't think he would have been quick to discard it.

After all, it functioned as a completely usable paper pensieve, and recorded the year that he was all over the castle looking for the Chamber of Secrets, ultimately finding it.

As well as the books on Horcruxes in the Room of Hidden Things.

And, while he was limited to his own 15–16-year-old vantage point to actually **read** any of those books now, he was only limited by his younger self's proximity to be able to take a closer look at the inner spaces of the castle.

And while wizards reducing their trunks to matchbox-size and carrying them around in their pockets is almost certainly fanon rather than canon, he would hardly be setting off for Albania without luggage. The diary wouldn't have taken up all that much room, after all.

And I rather think that he probably spent a fair amount of time "revisiting Hogwarts" over the decade that he spent in Albania on what was looking more and more like a wild goose chase.

After all, Hogwarts was home.



Once we managed to scramble out of the crater left in the wake of DHs, I thought I needed to revise my original scenario, slightly. Tom may *have* had a specific interest in Founder's artifacts.

There appear to be any number of legends circulating throughout Hogwarts regarding the Founders. Rowling didn't bother to fill us in on those unless the plot *du jour* needed



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her to, and she didn't really tell us much even when she did. I don't think Rowling herself is that interested in the legends of Hogwarts. Fortunately, that means she's left them alone for the rest of us to play with.

But we *did* need to be told about the legend of Salazar Slytherin's chamber of secrets. We also needed eventually to be told about the lost diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw. And even though Albus never came out and told us there was an actual legend involved, it is obvious that there is bound to be one concerning the sword of Godric Gryffindor as well. I very much doubt that Harry was the first student in the history of Hogwarts to have ever pulled that sword out of Godric's hat. I suspect there may be a legend pertaining to Helga Hufflepuff floating about too, but we were never in a position to need to know about that one.

(It probably wouldn't concern a cup, at any rate. Helga's family had taken the cup away with them. There is no legend concerning Salazar's locket either, for the same reason. The founder legends of the school only concern things that the founders were known to have left — or lost — at Hogwarts.)

Albus, as we know, placed a great deal of stock in legends. So, I think did Tom. Even if Tom never bothered to read Beedle the Bard or managed to draw a connection between the legendary Elder Wand and the story of Death and the three brothers, he would have learned all that he could about the legends specifically pertaining to Hogwarts, while he was at Hogwarts.

As a student Sorted into Slytherin it stands to reason that he would have quickly learned about Salazar's chamber. I think we can take it as given that he heard about Godric's sword as



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well. In fact there is probably some story circulating about that the sword only shows up when Hogwarts is in danger.

And by this time I don't think he managed to sweet-talk the secret of what happened to the Ravenclaw Diadem out of the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw by accident, either. He was following the trail of *precisely* that information. The Bloody Baron knows exactly who Ravenclaw's Grey Lady is, after all.

So Tom knew that he was going to have to leave Hogwarts, and indeed Britain, eventually if he wanted to retrieve the diadem, but he was going to have to either stay there, or come back, to get a crack at the sword. And of the two, he wanted a chance to get hold of the sword first. After all, once the sword became a Horcrux, it would disappear back into wherever it stayed between its appearances, and you couldn't ask for better security for a Horcrux than that.

I really don't think that he had a lot of expectation of actually being given the DADA position when he first applied for it from Headmaster Dippet either. He was only 18, after all, and hadn't even sat his NEWTs yet. But it was certainly worth asking, and meant that Dippet would remember his interest when he came back and asked for it again. He doesn't seem to have retaliated by jinxing the position when he didn't get it at that point. And he had *every* intention of coming back later and asking for it again.

His interlude at Borgin and Burke I still believe took place before rather than after any trip he made to Albania. The diadem, after all, had been there for a thousand years, more or less, it could sit a bit longer until he was ready to go hunting it.

If, as I have postulated, he had been in the habit of working

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at B&B during his summer breaks, after speaking with his uncle Morfin Gaunt and learning about the existence of the locket, he would have already searched the shop records for anything that resembled an entry regarding a locket in the year leading up to his own birth, and he would have certainly found at least one such. And would have also discovered who had purchased it.

And, as he had probably already learned while working at the shop, collectors always come back.

The wait paid dividends, too. Because by waiting for Hepzibah Smith to show up, he managed to get a crack at an undocumented artifact of Helga Hufflepuff's as well.

And then he was off to Albania to collect the diadem!

I think he hit a snag at that point. I've come round to the view that it may have taken him most of that missing decade to *find* the diadem. If it was hidden in a hollow tree back in the 11th or 12th century, the likelihood is that by around 1950 it was buried in so many centuries of forest compost that retrieving it would take a lot more effort than just a matter of wandering through the forest casting "Accio diadem" at random intervals. It may have taken him every bit of that decade in order to get a line on the proper place to dig.

But he managed it eventually, and then it was time to return to Britain, take up a post at Hogwarts and create a situation which would assure that the sword would make a reappearance.

Well, we all saw how well that went, didn't we?

He found that he needed to come up with a Plan B.



So, what would this Plan B need to consist of?

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First; he still needs to actually get into the castle. There is at least one important matter that he wants to take care of “on site.” Possibly some others as well. And now he is going to need to do it under Dumbledore’s crooked nose.

I think he also decides he’d best give the old coot a diversion so he won’t catch on to what the real purpose of this trip was. (i.e., Just because Rowling tells us the Sorting Hat is not a Horcrux, it does not mean that it has not been tampered with.)

So Tom makes an appointment and pretends to ask for the DADA position. He doesn’t expect to get the position, but he’s still miffed when he doesn’t. When refused, he stalks out of the Headmaster’s office and sorts out some preliminaries of his real agenda, which is determining the safety of his Horcruxes, and the location of the vanishing cabinet. On his clandestine return via the cabinets, he adds a layer of misdirection by thoroughly jinxing the DADA position, or possibly the classroom, as another distraction and solidly confounding the Hat. This has the helpful side effect of assuring that every year there will be a vacant position into which he might be able to insert an (expendable) agent. But even that wasn’t his main objective.

As Albus says, Tom must have had some reason for making a long journey on a nasty night other than to ask for a position he knew he wouldn’t get. And Albus is quite right. We just had no idea what that reason was at the time. Nor any blatant clues to Tom’s real purpose either.

Well, we now know that at some point he swung by the Room of Hidden Things either on his way to Albus’s office, or on his way back to the main staircase and, either at that time — or on a dark night on a return visit soon afterwards, pitched the

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Ravenclaw Diadem, which he had already turned into a Horcrux in amongst 1000 years of Hogwarts rubbish.

Second; he needed to devise some way of reaching the children he intended to enlist into his service. Even that early, he may have already discovered that somehow his magnificence seems to be less... compelling to the older generation. Even to much of his *own* generation, once they’d acquired jobs and families. Besides, the older generation was inclined to question his authority, and he wasn’t having any of that. He had, so far, enlisted only a couple of followers who were more than a year or three older than himself. And his rhetoric’s greatest appeal was to adolescents and post-adolescents.

Since he now was not going to be at the school to set up his own little club of “Riddlers” he needs to devise some other approach. Some sort of selection criteria which will get his target demographic all into a place where his prospective candidates can be approached by his existing followers. Or, rather, by *their* children. Which is where the confunded Hat comes in.

I do still tend to think that Tom tampered with the Sorting Hat. But I happily accept that Tom did not go to Hogwarts to *create* a Horcrux.

I did think that he may have gone to hide one. And I (along with countless others) was right about that.

But by the end of HBP, all the indications were that he only started parceling out Horcruxes to followers after he learned about the Prophecy. So I was no longer altogether convinced that he would have been hiding a Horcrux as early as that job interview. Rowling had certainly given us no reason to explain such a decision. Unless, of course, the Horcrux was somehow

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anchoring the DADA position's curse.

At that point we hadn't enough data for it to occur to me that at that point, Tom was systematically putting things back where they had originally come from, and that if they had been found, it was extremely unlikely that anyone would have taken them out of the Castle. Instead, they would have been far more likely to be put on display for all to admire.



We do not know how long he had been back in Britain when he learned that Dippet was gone and Albus promoted to Headmaster, either. Presumably long enough to have begun reeling his old school friends back into his train, but probably not more than a few weeks or months.

We also don't know whether he did any wandering about the castle, once he left Albus's office. He would have been under observation by the Hogwarts Art Collection if he had, but we do not know what they reported to Albus, since Albus didn't tell us.

Besides, I've long suspected that Albus wasn't the only wizard who didn't need a cloak in order to become invisible.

And, as I say, if Tom was already aware of the properties of the vanishing cabinets, he need not have made his infiltration visit at the same time as the job interview at all. He'd have come back later, possibly while Albus was in London at the Wizengamot or some such.

And then; mission (whatever said mission was) accomplished, since Riddle hadn't anything else that he particularly needed to do, he threw a tantrum for over 20 years, and embarked on a



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life of crime, trailing his enthralled followers after him, like the pied piper.



Until the ruddy Prophecy turned up, and he decided that killing an infant "child of Prophecy" and using *that* murder for his last Horcrux was an even better idea than trying to figure out a risk-free way of murdering Albus Dumbledore and making his final Horcrux from that. He would arrange for Dumbledore's death by some other means. And never mind making a Horcrux from it. That was no longer necessary. In fact, he may well have created his fifth Horcrux specifically in order to *accomplish* that particular murder.

Which is the real reason why I think that Severus Snape was sent to Hogwarts, and expected to take the DADA position (which he had originally applied for). Such a posting would assure that he would be out of the school within the year. He wasn't sent to do long-term spying. He went in with a specific *mission* that was supposed to be completed within one academic year. Because that was all the time he was going to get. In fact, quite literally, I suspect.

I also suspect that this specific job was to be that of assassin.



Which now raises the question of whether Tom really had only just created the Diary in '81, and what he had intended to do with it.

We cannot say for certain that the Diary was only made into a Horcrux just before he entrusted it to Lucius Malfoy. But it



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now seems very likely that he may have only created the Diary Horcrux once he was told about the Prophecy.

And we know that Tom likes to plan ahead.

By Halloween, 1979, the earliest date at which the Prophecy is most likely to have been made, Tom had just about everyone where he wanted them. The average wizard-in-the-street believed he was winning this war. The Ministry was in disarray. The DMLE had made itself over in his image and was preying on its own constituency. Practically the only uncompromised bastion of resistance appears to be Hogwarts castle, and Albus Dumbledore. Who was no doubt regarded as a continuing nuisance, but probably not that much of a threat.

And which we know wasn't "uncompromised" at all. It was serving as Tom's recruitment center. Much as the Ministry was serving as his publicity department. But the public didn't stop to consider that. Wizards, after all, aren't much on logical thinking. Or of looking unwanted facts in the face.

Tom still wanted that castle.

He needs to close the school, at least temporarily, so he can take it. I rather suspect that by that point it wasn't really the School that he wanted at all, it was the castle. He wanted it for his *own* stronghold. He seems to have changed his mind about closing the school by the time he went ahead and let his followers take over the Ministry. But that wasn't for another 16 years. Even Tom Riddle can change his mind over 16 years.

But, back in '81 I think he *did* just want the castle. He wanted it for *himself*.

Well, hey, he had nearly closed the school when he was back in 5th year, hadn't he? He could have been reliving that triumph

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any time over the past decades by dipping into the diary, and I think he probably had.

Open the Chamber of Secrets, set the Basilisk loose, kill a few students, and the Governors will close the school.

And if Dumbledore is also killed in the process, all the better.

Oh, he had excellent reason to want Severus Snape inside the school. He intended to make that a highly productive year, and Snape was going to be his little helper. Snape went off to the school with at least one piece of instruction. With the understanding that once he was there, other instructions would follow. In the meantime:

Order #1. Make a list of all the magical children born in the year following the Prophecy, and send it to Tom in order for him to be able to determine for certain whether he had missed anyone.

And I am sure that once Tom had taken care of the problem of the Prophecy child, there would have soon been the following:

Order #2. When Lucius passes you a Diary, write in it. Cooperate with what writes back.



When Snape begged Tom to spare Lily's life, he revealed a potential crack in his loyalty to the Dark Lord. I don't think Tom was delighted.

Oh, sure, he'd have spared Lily if she'd made it easy for him. Her death wasn't absolutely required. But he'd certainly make sure that Snape wasn't going to get any benefit from it. Rewarding the faithful is one thing, And allowing hostages to fortune (or one's future good behavior) is no bad thing either, but you do not give your own servants allies against you.

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More to the point; Snape was the only one of Tom's followers who knew anything of what that Prophecy was about. Rookwood might (and probably did) report that there was suddenly a Prophecy record in the DoM archives related to the Dark Lord (and probably to his downfall), but he had no way of learning what was in it. Tom did not intend that anyone else among his followers should find out what was in that Prophecy, Or even discover its existence, if Tom could help it. I suspect Rookwood was given good reason to keep his mouth shut.

Ergo: Snape was expendable. And once the Horcrux possessed him, Tom would have no need to question his loyalty.

I'm still not altogether sure that Tom realized that the Revenant would actually be able to escape from the book, although if the Diary Horcrux wasn't created until '81, and not created until after Bellatrix had needed to be forcibly disentangled from the Cup, that scenario begins to look a lot more likely. But just having it possess someone to direct the Basilisk may have been as far as Tom thought the project through.

If Tom did realize the Revenant would absorb the writer's very life force in order to escape, Snape, with his inappropriate sentimental attachments — as well as being the only follower to have known anything of the content of the Prophecy — would certainly have been Tom's top pick of a candidate.

And perhaps it was the reincarnated Diary Revenant that was supposed to murder Dumbledore, and to move the soul fragment that drove it into a classier housing than an inanimate book.

Would even the Elder wand have been any defense against a Revenant? Harry had to stab the *book* to destroy the Revenant. The book would have been lying in the Chamber of Secrets, out



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of Dumbledore's reach.

And the basic "cunning plan" may have been drafted out well before Tom had any definite idea of who the foretold child was. The child's identity was one of the snags against putting it into operation earlier.

He could have drafted the basic plan out as early as the end of 1979.

After he learned about the Prophecy.

And realized that it would be *much* easier to kill an infant, than it would be to kill Albus Dumbledore.



However: returning to the issue of the still missing Horcruxes; I'll admit I was with the majority in their conviction that the Cup was somewhere in the castle.

(ETA: well, *one* of them was in the castle. Not the Cup, however.)

Where it might actually be, I didn't know, and I was not going to try to guess. It could be in the Room of Hidden Things. It could also be hiding in plain sight in the Trophy Room. Although it would be hard to understand how Albus might have overlooked it for nearly 40 years if it was there.

And I did NOT believe that Tom had transfigured it into anything else. That would be missing the whole point of putting it in the castle at all. The Horcruxes all needed to remain recognizable.

I thought it could even be sitting in state under a bell jar in the Hufflepuff common room. How often does the Headmaster go there? For that matter; I thought we might also need to make another field trip down into the Chamber of Secrets.



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Harry didn't get a lot of opportunity to look around for little golden Cups on his last visit there.

(ETA: it turns out that we *did* need to go back down to the Chamber of Secrets. To collect Basilisk fangs. Of which a Basilisk apparently has more than the usual two. *sigh* Rowling, all teeth are not fangs. Not even all pointy teeth are fangs. In snakes, only *hollow* pointy teeth are fangs. And most snakes only have two.)

So let's look at the other end of the equation. And ask ourselves again: "What would Tom Riddle do?" For that matter, what has Tom done so far? We've seen or been told of where he intended three of the six Horcruxes to be end up. What do those places have in common?

The Gaunt hovel. The Sea Cave. The Chamber of Secrets.

Well. They are all places where Tom might readily feel that his "greatness" has been demonstrated. He pulled something of a coup off at each of them, without anyone ever having called him to account for it.

So. From our observations we know that once he decided to distribute his Horcruxes into places of safety, he saw to it that at least three of them were deposited in places which were associated with the confirmation of his own greatness.

And yes, I know that it was Malfoy who actually deployed the Diary in Year 2. But Riddle would have eventually given the order to deploy it himself, and the Revenant would always have dragged whatever unfortunate had the Diary down into the Chamber to die. The Diary would have ended up there, regardless. I think that much was always intended.

So what about the other ones? What other such places do we know about?

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Not many, I think. I make it at, oh, surprise, a total of... 3. Interesting, that.

There was the orphanage. Tom ran them ragged at that orphanage. And they didn't know what to do with him. He wasn't happy there, but oh, yes, he would have considered it a place in which his greatness was confirmed.

There was also the Riddle House. And we could all guess that he had already taken possession of that one. Much as he did the cave. I think he kept that particular location secret from his followers, too, or Bellatrix would have taken the place apart after he disappeared. I suspect only Peter actually knew about the Riddle House, and that only later. Unless Tom had some of his followers billeted there after the Azkaban breakout.

There was also Hepzibah Smith's home. Wherever it was. We hadn't a lot of expectation of getting back there. But he did pull off another of his coups in her home.

And, of course, there was Hogwarts. That's a large reason why he wants it.

Well, like I say, we hadn't a lot of expectation of ending up at Madam Smith's home, if that was even still owned by Hepzibah's family. And we had no idea of what had become of the building that housed the orphanage. But the Riddle house might have been worth investigating.

For that matter, so might the Crouch house.

So, at a very outside chance, might Borgin and Burkes.

And we already knew that we were going to be getting back to Hogwarts.



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So, at the end of HBP we were left with a yawning gap regarding the location of the Cup, The current location of the Locket, and the location and identity of the mystery Horcrux. I had what I thought was a very neat theory regarding the Sorting Hat (as did any number of other people). But Rowling evidently decided that it was one which needed to be headed off at the pass before it got too well established, because she shot it down on her official website update on Christmas 2005. The Sorting Hat was NOT a Horcrux.

Consequently, for quite some time I thought we were going to just have to wait until the 7th Book. Because there certainly didn't seem to be any clues regarding the mystery Horcrux lying about in the 6 we had (unless you wanted to make an argument for the extravagantly cursed silver-and-opal necklace that kept crossing our path). Ah well. She had to introduce *some* new material in the last book, didn't she?

Or at least, that's what I had decided as of Boxing Day 2005.



As a side note: We were all told, in DHs, that to destroy a Horcrux, one must damage the object housing it irretrievably. Beyond all magical recovery. But from what we had observed, while to destroy a Horcrux does certainly damage the object in which it is housed, it does not necessarily destroy the object. The Diary is still a diary, even if it has acquired a hole through it. The Ring is still a ring, even if the stone is cracked. Getting the soul fragment out of Harry will not necessarily *kill* Harry, although it will probably injure him. But, unlike a book or a ring, Harry can heal. This was a heartening consideration.



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Mind you, Rowling hand-waved the whole issue of how you destroy those things. The plot required that they had to be destroyed, so by Book 7 anyone who made the effort appears to have been able to do it, by just about whatever means was handy at the time. That wasn't always the case.

In CoS, it made perfect sense that stabbing a paper diary with a Basilisk fang would do it.

I don't think there is anyone who has ever read the series who would question the fact that Harry killed the Diary Horcrux with a Basilisk fang. It worked, it was in scale with the story as it stood at that point and it was believable.

I don't think anyone questions that Albus got himself fatally cursed by messing with the Ring, either. Although I have to admit that cracking the stone, but not damaging the actual *Ring* by whacking it with a sword, and yet NOT disabling the "Resurrection" function inherent to the stone itself, is harder to believe. And for that matter, I don't think that the stone would have been beyond magical repair, either. It's physically a stone, it was just cracked. It wasn't pulverized and the dust scattered to the winds. And the gold setting wasn't damaged at all.

A correspondent offered the suggestion that since the ring was the product of mortal wizards and mortal goblins, it stood to reason that the sword would be unable to undo whatever properties had been given the stone by Death. Works for me.

Given that it manifestly *didn't* undo the properties given it by Death. It only evicted the soul fragment.

But then we only got handed that blither about destroying a Horcrux requires damaging its housing beyond magical repair in DHs. And I'm not sure I believe it, either. Damage it enough to



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force the soul bit out, yes. But once the soul is gone, why shouldn't you be able to repair it later? I think Rowling just likes destroying things. Things like her readers' confidence in her intentions.

Rowling seems to have fallen as flat on her face over explaining how you destroy a Horcrux as she did evading the explanation of how to make one. Instead, over the course of the series, Rowling seems to have created a whole series of valuable artifacts only for the purpose of messily destroying them. Wasteful, I call it.

But then you are stuck having to consider that magic in Rowling's universe has never cost anybody *anything*. It's barely half a step removed from "Make a wish!"

Also; whereas Voldemort may have set nasty protective curses on some of his Horcruxes, since Harry wasn't intended to become one, there are no such curses on him or his scar. The (possibly) cursed artifact which was intended to become the last Horcrux might still be lying in the house at Godric's Hollow. We didn't go inside, after all. Rowling was more concerned with trying to make a snake walk on two legs than to remember anything about that.

I suppose the failure to make any attempt to round the Horcruxes up in Voldemort's absence is not altogether Albus's fault. Such an attempt would have been doomed to failure. Albus couldn't have got the Diary away from Lucius Malfoy. Let alone getting the Cup out of the Lestranges' vault. But all the indications are that he *knew* about the Locket. And he *certainly* knew about the Ring. He knew *about* the Cup as well, even if he didn't seem to know for certain where it was hidden.

But we still didn't know the identity of one of them.

Or, did we?



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Soon after the Christmas bombshell which exploded the theory of the Sorting Hat Horcrux, somebody else came up with an awfully tempting suggestion regarding that 4th Horcrux.

It rather sounded as though John Granger, the fellow with the "alchemical" reading of the Harry Potter series (he of the Scar-o-Vision filter) had nailed the identity of the mystery Horcrux as well. According to his theory, the Mystery Horcrux was Voldemort's wand.

The concept of the mystery Horcrux being a wand was certainly not unique to John Granger. Rather a lot of people were convinced that the 4th Horcrux was a wand. Most of them were also convinced that this wand was the Ravenclaw artifact, and the majority of these fans identified it as the wand which for years lay in state in Ollivander's window.

It's not a *bad* guess. But I was just not convinced. For one thing, despite the official title of the final book; 'HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS', and the association various fans were strenuously attempting to draw with the traditional four Hallows of Britain, or with the four suits of the Tarot, I didn't really see that much evidence that Rowling was actually using either the four Hallows of Britain *or* the symbolism of the Tarot as it applies to the Horcruxes. She has used the Tarot for *other* associated references elsewhere in the series, but she does not use it for *all* of her references.

She does make a claim of having researched quite a lot of information regarding Alchemy, and she also admits to the four Hogwarts Houses being representative of the four traditional



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elements, however.

The symbolism of the four elements as applied to the Hogwarts Houses goes: Gryffindor=Fire, Hufflepuff=Earth, Ravenclaw=Air, Slytherin=Water.

The Four Hallows of Britain are a Sword, a Spear, a Cauldron and a Stone.

The symbolism of the four elements as applied to the four suits of the Tarot goes: Wands/Rods=Air, Cups=Water, Swords=Fire, Coins=Earth.

Usually. A fairly widespread alternate reading claims the Wands/Rods are Fire, and the Swords are Air.

Well, okay, we have a Cup/Cauldron, but it is associated with the Earth House, not the Water House.

We have a Sword, properly associated with Fire, but inaccessible to Voldemort during the entire period that it would have been necessary for him to render it into a Horcrux. The Sword of Gryffindor is not a Horcrux. (As it turns out, thanks to Harry, it now kills Horcruxes.)

Albus has already “destroyed” a Stone, in fact he’s destroyed two of them, and now we are invited to make a bit of a stretch and claim that yet another piece of jewelry represents a Coin, and, once again, the House is Water, rather than Earth.

I think it’s a bit much to assume that Wand/Air/Spear (and we’ve had no hint of a Spear over the course of 6 books) is automatically going to apply to Ravenclaw and dictate the form of the missing Horcrux. None of the others have been that simple.

And, besides, if Riddle had turned Ollivander’s wand into a Horcrux, don’t you suppose he would have stolen it? He would hardly have left it in a shop where someone might purchase it,

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and he would never see it again. And “other people’s” wands tend to get snapped. (Which even if it happens accidentally is going to put them beyond “magical repair.”)

Not to mention that we have no way of knowing that just because there has always been a wand in Ollivander’s window, that it has always been the *same* wand. It’s just the same *cushion*.

Which is hardly to say that the people who were convinced that the wand in the window is the Horcrux were all necessarily wrong, and that I was right. I was just not convinced of it.

ETA: and indeed anyone who ever speculated that a wand was going to be relevant to the problem of settling Tom Riddle and his Horcruxes turns out to have been on the right track. But Rowling set *that* whole issue up to be the kind of mystery that it would be impossible for any mere reader to actually *solve*.

Plus, the theory of a wand Horcrux only flies until Rowling decided in DHs to amp up the “drama” by making all Horcruxes act like Tolkien’s One Ring. We only got that particular spitball tossed at us in DHs.

Much the same objection applied to the silver-and-opal necklace. Which in some quarters was also a contender. If Tom had turned it into a Horcrux, he would have stolen it. He wouldn’t have left it to be purchased by someone else where he might have lost track of it. He may hide them, but he insists on knowing where they are supposed to be.

And besides, I was not sure that the necklace *wasn’t* relevant to the problem of Tom and his Horcruxes. I just didn’t think it was relevant in the way that the fans usually assumed.



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We have no idea how many years that necklace spent sitting in Borgin and Burkes. We know it was there at the beginning of Harry's 2nd year. But that's all we know beyond question.

Nevertheless, to me, the description; "a magnificent silver and opal necklace" invokes visions of one of those marvelous art nouveau pieces from the 1890s or thereabouts. Which would have nothing to do with the founders, and would be easily a generation and more older than Tom Riddle.

It may well have already been in the shop when Tom started working there. And it was already known to be cursed.

But, upon any sort of consideration, there is something very strange about that curse. The sign in the shop claimed that it had already killed several Muggles. But Katie Bell, who is a witch, almost died from a brief contact with it through a small hole in her glove.

Now, while cursed jewelry is easy enough to cite in both folklore and literature, it's rather unusual to find a piece that will attack you before you even get a chance to *put it on*.

That's just *weird*. That can't be the original curse. Unless curses, like love potions, get stronger in storage.

Did Tom experiment with that curse? After all, the item was already advertised as cursed. The staff would have handled it with gloves anyway. And if a purchaser got more than he bargained for, well, he knew it was cursed when he bought it, didn't he?

Or did the exchange go in the other direction? Once again, once we notice that something has happened in the course of this series, it usually turns out to have happened again, often before the same book is over. In HBP we twice encountered

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deadly curses which were transmitted by contact with a piece of jewelry. Severus Snape managed to intercede quickly enough to save both victims. At least for a while.

Did Riddle get the idea to curse some of his Horcruxes from the necklace?

I think there is a good chance he may have. I think if Katie Bell had come back from St Mungoe's with a small black scar on her hand we'd be even more confident of it.

So, should we assume that there will be similar curses upon all of them?



Actually, I didn't think we needed to.

Tom didn't curse the Diary. He couldn't. Not even as a retrofit. The Diary needed to be given to someone who would handle it long enough for the Revenant to take control of him or her. So, no nasty poisonous curses that go off on contact, there.

I doubted that Harry (or the snake) had protective curses on them, either. If Harry is the 6th Horcrux, he wasn't intended to be, so there will be no additional magical protections of any kind *from Tom* on that one. And even if Albus's suggestion that his last Horcrux was the snake was correct, Pettigrew still needed to milk that snake's venom daily to make BabyMort's formula to keep him alive for the rest of the year. So, no contact curses there, either, thank you.

And if the Locket we saw briefly at #12 was the real Horcrux, it was passed from hand to hand among the whole Order of the Phoenix with no ill effects. No one could open it, (So? It was Slytherin's locket. Hiss; "Open, sez me" at it in Parseltongue

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like the Chamber. Duh!) but no one was harmed by it. At least not by casual contact with it. Or at least not until those people handling it in Book 7 *knew* it was a Horcrux. I rather think Rowling “overwrote” that particular complication in DHs. The malevolence of the Locket could have waited until Harry got it open. Then it would have at least come as a nasty surprise. (And reminded us all that it really wasn’t a “tame” Locket...)

And we really have no idea regarding the Cup.

(ETA: in the wake of DHs, we still don’t. Nobody handled it much on stage, and it wasn’t around all that long.)

So perhaps the question really ought to be why was the Ring cursed, but not the others?



I was beginning to think the answer might boil down to: “location, location, location.” Nobody was likely to get into the Chamber of Secrets to steal the Diary. Nor were there likely to be a lot of people making raids on the sea cave. The Riddle house at least had a caretaker to look after it.

But the Gaunt ruin was just sitting in the woods outside a village. Which in itself would have constituted an attractive nuisance to some of the local elements. The last thing Tom wanted was that someone might find his Horcrux and take it away from where he stashed it. Even if he didn’t get to kill his uncle Morfin with it.

I really don’t think that Tom was particularly concerned about Muggle trespassers. There are all sorts of spells to keep Muggles away from an area. Spells that he probably didn’t apply to the Riddle house because Frank Bryce was on site,

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and Tom *wanted* him there. But the curse on that Ring was designed for *wizards*. In fact it was probably designed for very powerful wizards, since Tom would have assumed that one of those (or his uncle Morfin, who Albus Dumbledore was agitating to get released from Azkaban) would be the only ones who would ever find it. And he never expected that anyone would manage to survive it. That Albus survived whatever had injured him at the start of year 6 was enough to deflect any suspicions that Tom might have had concerning the source of that injury.

Actually, it was long after the fact that a couple more dominoes landed on me and I started wondering whether the Ring might have been deliberately left in the Gaunt ruin as a trap. That cursed Ring appears to have been a multi-purpose hazard. I have come round to the idea that the Ring was indeed his first Horcrux, and that Tom hid it there before he left for Albania back in the late 1940s. If nothing else, it served as “traveler’s insurance” against any potential hazards which he might encounter on his projected trip.

In the second place, we have always understood that Morfin had been given a life sentence for the Riddle Massacre. Even if such was never stated outright. Actually in those days, I’m a little surprised he wasn’t simply hustled through the Veil. Muggle murderers were still routinely hanged in the 1940s. However, given my more recent considerations, I rather think that Tom had been put on alert by seeing an article in the Prophet stating that Albus Dumbledore was petitioning for Morfin’s release.

The only way that would have come about is that Tom’s memory tampering must have broken down, giving Albus at least some glimpse of the truth.



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Ergo: first off, to get out of Britain was now a priority. Secondly, if Morfin Gaunt is found dead in his shack of an anonymous curse, there really isn't likely to be anyone who will miss him. And regardless of what anyone might suspect, no one will be able to trace that curse back to Tom.

And if Albus decides to search the shack himself... well he was just asking for it, wasn't he?

All of which (prior to the release of DHs) led me to wonder whether Riddle had made a point of visiting Godric's Hollow since his return, to retrieve whatever artifact he took to the Potters'.

The Fidelius was broken, and while he (allegedly) knew that he had intended to create a Horcrux there, he may not be any better than anyone else at determining whether a given artifact is one. If you will remember, Harry had no reaction whatsoever to the Diary, apart from a certain vague feeling of familiarity. Or to the Diadem, when he encountered it in HBP either. Or to the Locket upon his first encountering it in OotP. Did Voldemort believe he had taken charge of his final Horcrux already, deceiving himself with what will turn out to be another fake? That would be a bit of symmetry, at least.

Although considering the (pasted on) "grabby" behavior of most of his Horcruxes, I think it would probably be fairly quickly evident whether a given artifact was one or not.

And, in any case, if he did return to Godric's Hollow and found the place maintained as a shrine, he may have simply left it alone.



And then, once again, there was the question of his wand.

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John Granger and I disagreed on the final implications of his wand theory. Much as we disagreed on the means by which it became a Horcrux. He hadn't gotten his version to its final stage, when I last saw it (any more than I had done for mine), and his final one may have come to an entirely different conclusion from the intermediate version that I encountered. But the whole idea was originally his, not mine. And we veered off in different directions with it.

His contention (in the version I encountered) was that Voldemort tried to turn his wand into a Horcrux the night he tried to kill Harry and that the Phoenix feather core rejected the soul fragment, expelling it with the AK that was supposed to kill Harry. Which is how Harry got saddled with it.

I didn't agree.

In the first place, I didn't think that Voldemort tried to kill Harry with an AK.

For another thing, if he turned his wand into a Horcrux he didn't do it that night.

I thought that if Tom Riddle had turned his wand into a Horcrux, it still was one. (At that point in canon most Horcruxes just sat there. They didn't try to possess their holders.)

I did rather like the idea that Riddle might have tried to make a Horcrux from his own wand. We already knew that at least one of his other Horcruxes was considered "significant" only by means of its connection to himself. And a wizard's wand is certainly an item of great significance to *him*. It is the single thing about him that defines his difference from a Muggle. Nor would anyone question the Wand being in his possession.

Such a decision would certainly be in character. Particularly once

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Riddle learned that the feather core of his wand had come from the very same Phoenix that was Dumbledore's companion bird.

And, since a Phoenix lives practically forever, there is nothing to say what other famous witches or wizards Fawkes may have chosen as companions over his long history.

This is not necessarily something that Tom would have been told as a child when he first purchased that wand. Ollivander was far more forthcoming with Harry when Harry purchased its brother wand — Harry having already acquired a “history” with its counterpart — than he might have been with Tom Riddle who had simply purchased one of a powerful pair of wands. But young Tom had been roaming about Diagon and Knockturn alleys every summer since that date, Possibly even taking summer jobs there, and he probably had impressed the local shopkeepers as favorably as he had most of the Hogwarts faculty. The 18–20-something Riddle also worked at Borgin and Burke for some time after finishing school, and he almost certainly associated with his fellow shopkeepers and their assistants. Such associations would have been an excellent source of information. Being an extremely personable young man — when he chose to be — he might well have learned about his wand's history from Ollivander during either of these later periods.

Being wholly self-absorbed, Riddle might very well have wanted to discover as much as he could of any artifact which was so closely associated with himself as his own wand, just on general principles. And we have already seen that Ollivander will talk wands interminably to anyone who gives him an opening. Learning that his own wand was cored with a feather from the Hogwarts Phoenix, and was one of only two such wands in



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existence might very well have elevated it to the status of being considered an appropriate receptacle for a fragment of his soul.

Besides; over his decade of self-exile, we know that any significant part of it spent in Britain must have been spent outside the wizarding world, for no other wizards saw hide nor hair of Tom during that time. He would not get a lot of opportunity to collect historical magical artifacts associated with the Founders of Hogwarts out among the Muggles.

And, while we now know that he *did* travel abroad during this period, under normal circumstances, how many artifacts associated with the founders of Hogwarts would he be likely to find outside of Great Britain? (Albus, after all, presumably knew nothing about what had become of the diadem.) I long suspected that Tom had probably intended ultimately to settle into the castle as a member of the staff, and create a situation that would flush the sword of Gryffindor out from hiding to serve as the receptacle for the Horcrux that he would create from Dumbledore's death. And I still think that was probably his original intention.

And in any case, he had over 20 years to decide on the artifact that he eventually took to the Potters.



But back during the period between the release of HBP and DHs, it had occurred to me that we had another maybe-pattern that needed to be considered as well. With the release of HBP, the circumstantial evidence was slowly building up which suggested that Tom may have only started distributing his Horcruxes into hiding places after he learned about the Prophecy.

(None of the following takes into account my much more



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recent suspicion that the first group of Horcruxes had all been stashed in the Room of Hidden Things for safekeeping before Tom headed out to Albania to hunt for the Diadem.)

Albus told us that Lucius Malfoy wasn't entrusted with the Diary until just before Voldemort's fall in 1981. If we accept Sirius's story of the Death of Regulus Black, and that Regulus Black was R.A.B., he could only have gotten hold of the Locket during 1980, around the time of his death.

(The R.A.B. speculation has been adjusted to 1980 in view of the fact that the dates on the tapestry sketch are completely unworkable when compared to things actually told us in canon. I do at least *try* to prioritize what is actually published in canon.)

At that point, we had to just assume that his was the Locket. We had no direct evidence to support that assumption. Just the circumstantial evidence that the item substituted for the Horcrux had been a locket.

It would not be unreasonable for Albus to have learned about the Diary's going to Lucius Malfoy from Snape, as well as from Dobby and Harry. But probably not until after the year of the Basilisk was over, since Malfoy certainly did not spread the news around that he had been entrusted with it before that. Probably not even to Snape. Afterward, Snape may have got his side of the story out of him, and Albus added it to his store of information.

And, at the time, Reggie Black seemed most likely to have learned about the Locket from one of the DEs in his own family, of which there were several, Bellatrix being the one highest in the Dark Lord's favor. At that point, I believed that Bellatrix may have been the one entrusted with the task of putting the

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Locket into the cave.

So we already had tenuous links between two of Tom's highly placed lieutenants and two of the known Horcruxes. What about the other three? Did he deliberately entrust the ones he did to members, or connections of the Black family?

Let me point out that we cannot really count the Snake/Scar along with the others for this stage of our reasoning. Those were created much too late to be a part of the same puzzle. Whichever one of them, if either, was actually a Horcrux, it was not hidden by Voldemort. And both are capable of independent movement, and are no longer where they were at the time of Tom's first defeat.

So. The Horcruxes, the lieutenants, and the final intended hiding places in the hidden objects puzzle represented by the first five Horcruxes, at the end of HBP appeared to be:

- 1 The Diary -> Lucius Malfoy -> the Chamber of Secrets
- 2 The Ring -> Placed it Himself -> the Gaunt Ruin
- 3 The Locket -> Bellatrix Lestrange? -> the Sea Cave
- 4 The Cup -> Unknown -> Unknown
- 5 The [Wand?] -> (inadvertently Wormtail) -> Keep it Himself

Given the speed with which Albus went off and found the Peverill Ring, once he was determined to launch "Operation Horcrux" one does have to wonder whether reporting the Prophecy had raised Snape high enough in the ranks that he was also entrusted with a "valuable artifact" by his Master, and given instructions of where to hide it. But the likelihood is that Tom hid the Peverill Ring in the ruins of the house it had originally come from himself. Also that he had probably done so quite some time before he chose to hide the others. The

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curse on that one isn't really something that I think he would have trusted a subordinate to juggle. Plus, Albus was fully conversant with the story of that Ring, and may well have gone straight to Marvelo's house to find Marvelo's ring without additional prompting. He did know Tom's style.

So. We had a couple of new blanks to fill in. IS there another lieutenant that we needed to be watching for who may have hidden the Cup? Had we been in proximity to a suspected Horcrux depository site over the course of the series?

Well actually, yes. The Riddle House. Tom could have left the Cup hidden there himself, keeping that location secret from all of his followers. He could have even put it there at any time after he came to check on the Gaunt hovel after his return from hunting the Diadem — there is probably a wall safe somewhere in the Riddle house. If so, the Cup could have been waiting there for BabyMort in year 4.

Whether it was still there at the opening of DHs is debatable. He may have moved it to somewhere he considered safer, if the opportunity presented itself. Particularly since Pettigrew now knew about the Riddle House.

Voldemort had all that year in which to redirect the Cup, with a zealot follower and his Imperiused father to play errand boys. And both of the Crouches spent a significant amount of time at Hogwarts. Either could have taken the Cup there and concealed it.

A large percentage of readers really did expect the Cup to turn up at Hogwarts. I did too. The question was where was it hidden, and when did it get there. If Tom didn't start hiding the Horcruxes until after he knew about the Prophecy, then over

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the course of Year 4 seemed to be the best possibility for getting it there. Riddle had always intended to take possession of that castle. I rather think that he may have originally intended that he and his Horcruxes should all eventually end up there.

And those of us who had adopted the Book 3 = Book 7 reading of the series and were expecting book 7 to reflect PoA, consequently, were primed to feel the weight of a "dead man's hand" across the action of the novel. It was hard to not assume that that hand would "of course" be Dumbledore's. (ETA: I called that right, and now I'm sorry.)

But there are also the living dead. So perhaps we ought to give a bit of consideration as to whether impersonating Moody and assisting in Harry's abduction was Barty Crouch Jr's only function over the course of Year 4. Maybe it isn't Kreachur we should have been eyeing with suspicion, but Winky.

And, while we are on the subject; what has become of the Crouch property?

We were told that Barty Jr was the last of his line.

He's in no condition to ask what became of it.

The Crouch holdings originally included a House Elf. What kind of properties typically do that? Large, rich, old ones isn't it?

Crouch Sr was held prisoner in his own home, under Imperius, until he managed to make his escape. Tom and Peter were back at the Riddle house by the time Barty sent them word of his having performed damage control. How do we know they didn't return to the Crouch estate once they learned of Crouch Sr's death?

After all, who was going to think to look for them there?

And it is the site of another of Riddle's coups, isn't it?

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There is also the disturbing factor that Tom knew that he had lost one of his Horcruxes.

It appears that I was incorrect when I speculated that he did not discover that particular fact until after the end of OotP when Lucius Malfoy had been packed off to Azkaban, and Riddle wanted his Diary back.

For Albus does claim that Voldemort got that information out of Malfoy, directly. And if Albus had an eyewitness account (and it certainly sounds like he did) it must have happened before September 1 of year 5. The only eyewitness we know who was available to report such matters would be Snape, and, as a Head of House, Snape remains on campus through the Christmas and Easter breaks. So the discovery had to have taken place before the school year commenced.

And Harry *did* have an attack through his scar (and a bad one, too) the night before boarding the Hogwarts Express that year. An attack which was never explained to the reader. But that gets us no forwarder on the puzzle regarding the rest of Tom's collection.

That discovery also didn't take place until more than a year after Tom had acquired Nagini. But the fact that he might have decided to replace the Diary was not in itself evidence that Nagini was also a Horcrux. (Which I obstinately refused to believe until Rowling absolutely insisted on it.)

I thought that he had more likely concluded that his attempt to create a Horcrux from the murder of the Prophecy Child had simply failed. Nagini therefore became what he thought

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was his sixth, because he needed her kept close for the sake of her venom, but didn't want to take the risk that, being a large snake, she might decide to eat him. He was still BabyMort, and bite-sized, after all.

Although that doesn't tell us whether the book on Horcruxes ever claimed that one could create a Horcrux from a living creature. I'm sure that if it did, it would have pointed out that living creatures eventually die. The Horcrux will only preserve its maker's life. Not the host's.

But then, he only truly needed the snake until he had managed to create himself a new body.

It doesn't necessarily mean that he might never have considered making another. Although, if he thought he already had his set of six, even if one of them was already destroyed, he was not going to try to stir the pot, further.

For one thing, there was the question of whether he even *could* create another one. There must be a practical limit of how many of the things can safely be created from a single soul. I suspected that he may already have been over that limit, and knew it.

Plus the underlying question is whether he wanted his soul in 7 pieces, or a 7-part soul. He already *had* a 7-part soul, even if he knows that he has lost at least one of the parts. This question was likely to be irresolvable until we caught up to him. If he looked even less human than he did in OotP, we would know that he had done it again. And heaven only knows what artifact he may have used for it.

But there isn't that much mystery as to which murder he would have used for it. He is suspected of having killed Amelia Bones personally. And there is no question but that her murder

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was a significant one.

But this particular issue was one that I would have just as soon not get too heavily into, because I thought it might be a dead end.

Which it did, indeed, turn out to be.



At this point I feel as though I ought to draw attention to the fact that my own determination to read the series as a continuing mystery adventure with deliberately placed clues and careful misdirections throughout, pretty much dictates the sort of interpretations which I am going to formulate in my reading of it. And the possibility that Voldemort's wand was the "mystery Horcrux" looked mighty good insofar as that if this was the case we had a ready-made, nicely dramatic, playscript for its "unmasking" — and its destruction.

Tom Riddle wasn't the only person who had an association with that wand.

Peter Pettigrew allegedly took charge of that wand for over a dozen years. (Although he doesn't seem to have used it. There were no extra spells in the *Priori Incantatum* log, apart from Cedric's murder.)

You know. Pettigrew. *Him*. The little man who seems to have had a ringside seat to just about every event of significance related to the former Tom Riddle since the Prophecy was turned loose. The fellow that almost certainly had at least one more major part to play in this story — for all that Rowling had stuffed him into the background and seemed to be earnestly trying to make everyone forget that he was there.



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(ETA: *sigh* If only. I seriously wonder whether Rowling was so determined to just have the whole thing over that she jettisoned any plans she may have once had for that quarter. For it certainly reads as if she bundled Pettigrew out of the story in so brusque a manner because she no longer knew what to do with him — possibly after having already discarded the rest of the components she needed for finishing off his character arc.)

The wand would be an entirely different sort of weapon from the Diary. Riddle had no reason to design it so the soul fragment would ever try to take control of the user. Such behavior would have been quite unnecessary, and quite undesirable. He never expected anyone to be using that wand but himself.

Plus, we *didn't* have all of his Horcruxes acting like the One Ring back when we were still developing theories. That was a complication that was only dumped on us in book 7. Prior to that, the Diary, which did do that kind of thing, was openly stated as having been *unique*.

Even so, a wand with a living soul might still have some sort of influence upon someone who was in contact with it over long periods of time. And while we are at it, we need to re-evaluate Albus's conviction that Riddle felt uncomfortable wearing the Ring after turning it into a Horcrux. If he is correct in that belief, (and we've no idea where he supposedly came by that information) then we need to just dismiss the possibility of Voldemort's wand being the mystery Horcrux from the get-go.

But I rather doubted that Albus was inside Tom's head to find out why he wasn't wearing the Ring when he paid his visit to Madam Smith, or indeed when he paid his visit to Hogwarts to ask for the DADA position. So I was prepared to at least



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follow the possibility of the Wand Horcrux a bit farther.

We do not know what Pettigrew did with the wand once he removed it from the house at Godric's Hollow. He may have just stashed it somewhere (in the Weasley's attic, guarded by the Ghoul, along with James and Lily's?). Or he may have chosen to keep it on him.

From the example of Minerva McGonagall, an Animagus seems to transform along with all of his clothing and accessories, including his wand. Peter/Scabbers might have had that wand, along with a fragment of Tom Riddle's soul, literally as a part of his own body for a dozen years as a rat. Yes, Riddle may well have had more reason to use Pettigrew as the servant whose flesh would revive him than just the fact that he happened to be available.

But not if all Horcruxes are grabby. It would have taken Peter over long before that.

However, we had already enough reason to believe that Pettigrew — who clearly *appeared* to have a final part to play in this drama — had a thing for wands. He seems to have collected them. He made a snatch for any untended wand that crossed his path. And I thought that there was a reason that the first thing we saw him do with his new silver hand was to pick up a twig and crush it to powder. (ETA: well I guess you can say there was. But I can't readily think of how Rowling could have come up with a lamer one if she'd been trying.)

For that matter, Pettigrew was hardly with Voldemort because of his great devotion to the cause of pureblood supremacy. He was there because he didn't believe he had anywhere else to go. And I thought that Voldemort may have shot himself

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in the foot by sending that particular follower — who was not blindly loyal, and who had a fine collection of resentments to work on, into close proximity with Severus Snape — whom I was convinced was committed to Dumbledore's agenda — where Snape could go to work on Pettigrew with whatever taunts and snide jabs about how his current "friends" do not seem to treat him any better than his former friends did until Pettigrew felt totally ill-done-by and was ready to lash out because he had nothing left to lose. And if Pettigrew tried to remind Snape that he owed his life to James, Snape would just remind him that he owed his life to Harry. For I suspected that Albus had filled him in on that. After all, Albus probably expected that Snape *would* eventually have to be dealing with Pettigrew.

And if the wand WAS a Horcrux, in the final showdown we might expect Peter to finally make one of his wand snatches (expecting to be killed for it — although not in the manner he would be — Judas did, after all, hang himself), destroy the wand by crushing it to powder and possibly be blown up as a result of it, thereby wiping out any debts which Pettigrew may owe anybody.

And this reading could also have meant that the final confrontation would be forced upon Harry long before he was ready for it. He starts Book 7 with two Horcruxes down, and he knows the general appearance of two others. I thought we could take it as read that he would deal with the Locket, and probably manage to find and settle the Cup. But if the 4th one was the Wand, I did not think he or anyone other than Voldemort would be aware of that until it got taken out of action, and the taking of it out would be a major shock to everybody.

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And Harry might only realize in the course of the actual showdown that he was the last of them. Or maybe not. I still thought the showdown might be at the DoM, and he and his friends would already have some reason to be there.

But I was no longer as convinced that it would take place at the DoM as I was before HBP. Although, I did have to admit that the probability that the scene depicted upon the cover of the US edition of the forthcoming book was indeed set in the Hall of the Veil was very strong.

However; given that the artist of the US editions had a track record of (since GoF, anyway) always depicting a scene that is actually *in* the book, and one that takes place during the run-up to the climax, but never — to that point — had been a depiction of the climax itself. We needed to keep in mind the possibility that this might be an earlier, abortive confrontation, and that in the actual story, Harry would get away and they would have to stage a rematch.



Still, I was convinced that if the Wand was a Horcrux, there ought to be some clue to it in the existing text. Probably in the confrontation in the graveyard. Probably something for which we did not have the proper context at the time.

And there *is* something there that doesn't altogether fit.

It was not nearly as solid a clue as I would like, but I suspected that our maybe-clue could be the fact that Harry's scar did one of its numbers when Cedric Diggory was killed. Harry's scar only acts up when Voldemort is involved.

But, it was *Pettigrew* who killed Cedric.



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However, he did it with *Voldemort's* Wand.

Admittedly, Harry's scar was already kicking up a tantrum over Voldemort's proximity. But when Pettigrew cast that AK, the pain *spiked*.

The only other things that caused the pain of his scar to spike that evening (apart from being put under Cruciatus) was when Voldemort physically touched him, and when Voldemort called the Death Eaters through Pettigrew's Dark Mark. And he didn't do *either* of those with a wand.

Ergo: Harry may have been reacting to a soul fragment housed in the Wand. His scar supposedly only acts up when Voldemort is involved. There is no reason why he should react to a 3rd party casting an unforgivable curse in his vicinity, whether or not it was on Voldemort's orders. If a wand is only a wand, casting an AK with Voldemort's wand ought not to cause any more reaction than if the 3rd party casts an AK with his own wand — as Snape did on the Astronomy tower. Harry was shocked and horrified when Snape cast his AK, but his scar didn't even itch.

So, Voldemort's wand may *not* be just a wand.



However, in that case you would think that it ought to set the scar off whenever that wand is used for an unforgivable. Certainly for an AK. But it doesn't. Which was another puzzle.

Rereading both the battle of the Atrium and the duel in the graveyard; Voldemort was throwing around curses in both of those, and Harry was in pain. But it all seems to have just been the usual QuirrellMort effect where whenever Voldemort is



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close and feeling murderous the scar acts up.

Still, I had never been able to account for the scar pitching a fit when *Pettigrew* killed Cedric. And in the back of my mind, I had been being bugged by that for years. Voldemort was present, yes, as BabyMort and Harry's scar was already reacting to his presence before Pettigrew's AK was cast. But the pain got worse when Pettigrew cast that AK. Nor is that the only time it did so over the course of the book.

At the opening of GoF Voldemort killed Frank Bryce, with an AK, with that wand, and Harry witnessed it at long-distance, and woke with his scar hurting.

In his vision in chapter 29, his scar also reacted to Voldemort's Crucio-ing Wormtail, for letting Crouch escape, with that wand. So it would appear to react to Cruciatus as well.

At least it reacts to it at long distance in a vision. The pain did *not* spike when Voldemort Crucio-ed Avery, with that wand, right there in the graveyard in Harry's presence.

Presumably Harry's scar was already hurting as much or more than it had during his vision of the Riddle House, so there was no additional effect when Voldemort used his own wand in Harry's presence to cast an Unforgivable curse on a third party.

But this whole issue is totally confused, and I no longer think we can take reports of the scar hurting as anything more than Rowling flinging around declarations of Harry being in pain to try to create drama. I think we'd be very mistaken indeed, to put any dependence at all upon whether to not it ever **means** anything.

Which, given that the wand was never one of Tom's Horcruxes seems all too evident.

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However, I did reflect that this all could just be a fumble in the writing, which in retrospect appears to be the case.

Because we also had to keep in mind that Harry's scar had shown no reaction to any of the other Horcruxes, or suspected Horcruxes to which he had been exposed. Not to the locket at #12. Not to the Diadem in the Room of Hidden Things. Not to the Diary. Not even to the *Diary Revenant*. And we know now what that Revenant was, and the Revenant was certainly "feeling murderous" enough to cause a reaction if there was going to be one. And it didn't. (Which I think was a mistake. The scar *ought* to have reacted to the Revenant.) So the whole question is still up in the air.

But there was an awful lot of critical information that was still awaiting answers at the end of Book 6. And if Dumbledore had deliberately staged his own removal from the game board the night of the adventure of the sea cave, there seemed to be a good chance that he left some of those answers in places where they might be found. The Pensieve was one possibility. And if there was a collection of little bottles with it, all the better. (We just had to hope they were labeled.)

And it was only a matter of time before his portrait woke up. A portrait is only a residual echo of the actual person, but it is a great deal better than nothing.

And for that matter there was also Aberforth. And Horace Slughorn.

But the way things seemed to be shaping up; while Harry may or may not return to classes, he was still going to have to

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return to Hogwarts. I suspected that the school was going to remain closed for the following year. And Harry and Co. might not be the only trespassers.

Harry, I thought, do it the easy way, for once. You've got the money. Send somebody in the Order to buy that black lacquer cabinet in Borgin and Burkes.

Before someone else gets the same idea.

It would be just perfect for the parlor in Grimmauld Place.

In fact, for a long time I suspected it may have originally started out there.



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Well, with the release of DHs, this line of exploration got hosed to the point of being irretrievable. Once again I wouldn't have been nearly so disgruntled by the fact if what Rowling had given us in its place had been something *better*. But, without excessive arrogance, I really cannot see that it was. What Rowling gave us doesn't even map out properly with what she had already told us in Books 5 & 6.

No. Not even in a manner which could be read as an intentional revelation which clarified matters, or in a last ditch effort, as a revelation of some piece of clever misdirection. It comes across as just crass and lazy carelessness which only raises more questions (most prominently over what she thought she was doing), and made the issue even *more* confusing than it needed to be.



The whole business of the sea cave adventure(s) is not even internally consistent. Regulus supposedly tells Kreacher to leave him there in the Cave (to die), take the Locket home, and destroy it. Which strongly suggests that his death was an intentional suicide. If he had wanted to *try* to survive (which it is implied *might* have been possible, after all Kreacher had survived that potion) he would have only needed to have ordered Kreacher to take him home once he had drunk the potion, and switched the locket, and to have given himself time to recover as well. He knows that Kreacher could have done that. Kreacher had done it before, indeed, it was Kreacher who took them both to the cave in the first place.

Now, admittedly, doing that might have turned out to be

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awkward as all get out, since Voldemort might have summoned Regulus before he recovered, which would have been very hard for Regulus to have explained. Particularly to a master Legilimens. Not to mention trying to explain his sudden illness to his mother. But is it really worth dying just to avoid having to make a few explanations?



Kreacher also tells us that Regulus was only 17 when he died, so presumably he would have still been in school. I cannot see how he would have considered it better to die rather than to miss the Hogwarts Express. Especially if he was clearly ill at the time and might have returned to school once he recovered. Nor do I believe that Voldemort typically summoned followers who are still at school during the periods that they were supposed to be in attendance at Hogwarts. (Never mind the fundamental idiocy of physically marking followers who were living in dormitories under Albus's eye — but then I suppose thumbing his non-nose at Albus may have been much of the point.)

But evidently Rowling considered it easier to just arbitrarily and illogically kill the boy off to create a tragic antihero (and the “good Slytherin” that the fans were still begging for) than to deal with the logistics of her setup.

Well, okay, not *exactly*. I'm being unfair. She *had* already set it up two books earlier that Regulus Black had died for some reason important to the overall story arc. Even if it appears she couldn't come up with a plausible one by the time she had to write it out. It made for some cheap “drama” and easy tear-jerking. I say that it was just another piece of sleazy writing.



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And, also, how is a deliberate suicide supposed to square with his “screw you” note in which he boasts that he had destroyed the real Horcrux? As it now turns out, he evidently never even intended to make an attempt at its actual destruction. He left Kreacher holding the bag and simply intended to be dead.

We are left having to conclude that Regulus must have deliberately killed himself just to get free of Riddle's service. Which might make a sort of sense if you are into shallow reasoning. Not to mention that few of the Blacks that we ever met were anything that anyone could regard as particularly *stable*.

But it also now appears that Regulus was content to die without having ever had any *real* intention of *personally* striking a conclusive blow against Riddle. One which would do Riddle some actual damage, regardless of what he spouted off about the matter in his “screw you” suicide note.

It was an empty boast. The kid died a liar and a braggart. So much for “brave Regulus.” It was clearly easier for him to face death than to face Tom. Or than even to make a legitimate attempt to destroy the Horcrux once he stole it.

Unless... the determination to suicide may have itself been induced by the Potion. Albus was also pleading for death by the time he reached the bottom of that basin.

I could just *about* accept that explanation.

In which case the Potion was a more effective barrier than we've all been crediting it with being.



But if Rowling had been sincere in her own intentions, she ought at least to have had Regulus die in an actual *attempt* to



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destroy the Horcrux. If he knew what it was, he ought to have had some idea of *how* to destroy Horcruxes. It would have hardly astonished any reader if it turned out to be more difficult than he had expected.

For that matter how does Kreachur's tale now fit with Sirius's 'likely story' of Regulus having got in, got cold feet, and been murdered by his fellow DEs, on Voldemort's orders because of it? What left field did *that* version come from?

Let alone Remus's contention that Regulus had managed to elude his fellow DEs for no more than a few days to a week before they caught him. Who is the fantasist here? Because it certainly sounds like *someone* has to be.

I suspect that we can just summarily dismiss the bloody tapestry sketch dates which conflict both with the statement that his death had occurred "some 15 years earlier" from the date at which Harry noted it, in the summer of 1995 in OotP, as well as Kreachur's statement in DHs that he died a year after having signed on with the DEs at the age of 16. The tapestry sketch claims that he died in 1979 (i.e., 16 years earlier) and, from a birth date in 1961, that he had managed to reach the age of 18 when he died.

If Rowling had been deliberately intending to create as many pointless contradictions to her earlier statements as possible, she couldn't have done it better.

Consequently, I flatly don't believe her on *any* of it.

Therefore, take this as a disclaimer; the following has NOT been reworked to reflect most of what we were told in the course of DHs. Although I have added a few annotations which have been made in recognition of the final book in the series

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At least this version *attempts* to hold together, is as internally consistent as I could manage to get it, and reflects what we had actually been *told* up to the end of HBP.

Even if, *act*o Rowling, it is wrong.

Allegedly there were originally supposed to be six Horcruxes. Harry had already dealt with one of them. Dumbledore took care of another one for him.

And there was at least one joker in the deck. The one that they just brought back from the sea cave was a fake.

Which led a large percentage of the readers straight to Regulus Black.

And, given time, would undoubtedly lead Harry to Regulus Black, as well.

By the time DHs was pending, it was yet again time to — once more — re-evaluate what we thought we knew about the problem of the Horcruxes.

The pertinent round of this continuing re-evaluation cycle was set off over the months of July and August, 2006, when I spent a good deal of my free time working with LiveJournalists Swythyv and Professor_Mum, as well as John Granger of the HogwartsProfessor.com board, and a couple of others, on a collection of essays related to the events that went on in HBP. (The book, 'WHO KILLED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE?' is still available from amazon.com, and possibly other sources.)

As usual, some of their theories turned out to make fine

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launching pads for adjustments to existing theories of my own, several of which spun off in rather different directions from their originals. But between the three of us, Swythyv, Professor_Mum, and I, we'd managed to draft out a backstory which, amazingly enough, accounted for just about all of the screwy details related to the Case of the Hijacked Horcrux.

It may not have been Rowling's intended backstory, but it was at least a viable one, and was supported by what we had been given to work from by that date, on enough points to make a plausible theory, even if it later turned out not to be correct.

The whole question of Lord Voldemort's Horcruxes was burgeoning out of control by that time, so the original essay was split. This particular portion now concentrates entirely on our extrapolations of Regulus Black and his implied Indiana Jonesy adventure concerning the Dark Lord's sea cave and the stolen Horcrux. Parts of it may be duplicated in the essay regarding the House of Black.

Speculations on the other Horcruxes, and Horcruxes in general can now be found in the essays entitled 'Broken Promise: An Introduction to Horcruxes', and 'Horcrux Redux' (parts 1 & 2).



For several months prior to that, it had looked like any attempt to sort out the issues attendant upon this particular component of the "find the hidden objects" problem concerning the adventure of Harry Potter and the Seven Riddles pretty much had to start from the adventure of the sea cave. And with Regulus Black, aka; R.A.B.

By that point I was no longer quite as convinced that this was

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the *real* starting point as I had been when I began. Although it still obviously mattered. And, to be fair, with Harry finishing Book 6 determined to find out who R.A.B. was, and what he did with the stolen Horcrux, this seemed to almost certainly be where Rowling would initiate the next part of the quest.

But by that time several rounds of dominoes had toppled since HBP came out. And several new possibilities had opened up in areas which looked like they might turn out to be relevant to this seemingly irresolvable problem.

Because the problem, as Rowling set it up, *did* appear to be irresolvable. Just as with the bloody Potions book, whatever pattern you attempted to lay out all the pieces in, you always seemed to be stuck with one left over. Always one which didn't seem to fit anywhere, but which could not be safely discarded.

The first question, of course, was whether or not we could safely assume that Regulus Black and the mysterious R.A.B. were the same person.

I really did think we could. And if I had turned out to be wrong, I would have had plenty of company. The fandom as a whole had pretty well unilaterally accepted that Regulus Black was R.A.B. and I could see no reason to raise objections to this conclusion. Rowling had not given us anything upon which a reasonable objection could be based.

In fact, in the joint interview of July 2005, Rowling had tacitly admitted that R.A.B. was Regulus Black. Insofar as she had stated that as of that point in the series we had met or heard of pretty well all of the cast of significant characters, (which turned out not quite to be the case. Ariana Dumbledore, much? Not that she was significant to the problem of the Horcruxes)

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and that while we might discover more about some of the ones we'd already met, and there may be some minor characters added in passing, the major players were all known to us by then. So I had a certain degree of confidence in continuing to reason from the standpoint that R.A.B. and Regulus Black were one and the same.

So. Item 1: we already understood that if Regulus Black was indeed R.A.B., then he had certainly known about at least one of the Horcruxes.

Either that knowledge alone, or something else about either Voldemort himself, or his activities, his objectives, or his methods, sent Reggie into a tailspin. We had too little direct information to be able to really determine what it was exactly that set him off. Fanfic writers and my fellow theorists all still had a few more months to play with this. But I thought we were all getting a lot closer to a unified theory which, while it still may not be correct, was at least internally consistent.

As I stated at the time; we had not yet heard quite the last of Regulus Black, even though we had already been told the end of Regulus Black. Or, what everyone in the books seemed to confidently believe to have been his end.

I was not entirely convinced of that, either. Although I was a lot more convinced of it than I had been a year or so earlier. If the final book of the series was built to what had appeared to be Rowling's recent pattern and was being set up to echo the 3rd book, then we were certainly being invited to expect to find out that somebody had at some point faked their own death. And Reggie was one of our top candidates to have done so. Although it didn't necessarily follow that he was the one

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who had. After all, we had never even heard of Peter Pettigrew, until we got a few chapters into PoA, and by this time in the series we already had a list of possible casualties for alleged death-faking.

But, we did need to find out for certain what R.A.B. did with the real Horcrux. And we could be confident that this, at least, was not an issue that Rowling was going to dodge.

In HBP Dumbledore had strongly implied to Harry that no one else knew about Lord Voldemort's Horcruxes, but with the evidence of R.A.B.'s "Boo! Sucks!" note staring us in the face we just couldn't accept Dumbledore's statements on the subject at face value. I suggested that maybe, despite what Rowling tells us in her interview, we needed to stop assuming that Dumbledore was always right, even if he was "never very wide of the mark".

Particularly if the mysterious R.A.B. was supposed to be Regulus Black. Regulus Black was a wet-behind-the-ears raw recruit who didn't make it to his 18th birthday. If *he* could figure it out, how could we say that somebody else hadn't as well?



Needless to say, I doubted very much that Regulus's repudiation of Lord Voldemort and all of his works was motivated by the same kind of squeamishness on the subject of Horcruxes as had been demonstrated by Horace Slughorn. That does not fit with anything that we were shown concerning the Death Eaters' (let alone the Black family's) presumed total acceptance of all aspects of Dark magic.

Another thing which appeared to be self-evident is that Reg-

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ulus not only learned of the existence of a Horcrux, he seems to have learned what had been done with it. Which is to say that he appears to have learned about the sea cave. And, from the information at our disposal, we were invited to believe that he also managed to figure out how to retrieve the Horcrux from where Voldemort had hidden it.

None of which I continued to be altogether convinced of, by that time, either. But it threw us a considerable curve.

From our own trip into that cave we had been given to understand that getting a Horcrux out of that basin is a two-person job.

If, that is, what Dumbledore told us about it was strictly on the level. It wouldn't be the first time that information from Albus Dumbledore, in fact, wasn't.

But, unless we had all been fed either deliberately false — or honestly mistaken — information, all appearances at that point suggested that Regulus Black *did* manage to get the Horcrux out of the cave in time to later be killed by his fellow Death Eaters.

Our information on that point was suspect, however. Neither of our primary informants on the matter of Regulus's supposed flight, pursuit, and death are people who were in a position to actually know any of the truth of the report. Sirius Black's statements, (he who'd had nothing whatsoever to do with his family for about 4 years by that time) were at 2nd hand and tended to be extremely biased. Remus Lupin's views are less biased, but likely to be even more distant from any reliable source.

Sirius clearly did not know who actually killed his brother, nor does he say anything about having attempted to find out, even though Regulus was allegedly murdered over a year before his own imprisonment in Azkaban. Remus states only that Reg-

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ulus survived the Dark Lord's wrath no more than a few days.

Which suggested that this was the kind of information that must have filtered back to Sirius over the grapevine. And who knows how much it may have morphed by the time it reached him.

Or who, in fact, released it to the grapevine in the first place.



In the wake of DHs, I now suppose that it was only when Regulus's fanboy scrapbooks of Lord Voldemort turned up in his room after his death was recorded by the Black family tapestry that his family concluded that he had been swept up in the DE movement, and that it must have directly contributed to his death. Since he had not been killed by Aurors or in any known bit of DE action, the family assumed that he must have been killed by his associates on their leader's orders. In actual fact, he simply went missing, and a death date appeared on the tapestry. No one other than Kreachur knew anything further. Anything beyond that was simply gossip or rumor-mongering.

And we are also supposed to believe that apparently no one in the whole Black family ever thought to ask Kreachur where Regulus was, or what had happened to him. (Although it does belatedly raise the question of whether the knowledge of her favorite son's death in a trap devised by Lord Voldemort might not have been what finally drove Walburga round the bend.)

Considering that Regulus was almost certainly still a student at Hogwarts, the report of his death during a term break could have set off any number of student rumors. Any one of which Sirius might have got hold of without ever hearing his family's version. Plus, by the time Harry showed up at #12 Sirius had

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already seen his brother's room and the scrapbooks.

But Remus's confirmation that Reggie had only evaded DEs for a few days before they caught him is still a report straight from Cloud-Cuckooland.

With the release of the Black family tapestry sketch, showing the last 6 generations of the Black Family Genealogical Tapestry, which Rowling donated to a charity auction in February of 2006, we finally had what we believed to be the dates of Regulus Black's life recorded as 1961 to 1979.

This came as a considerable surprise, since from the textual evidence of OotP we had earlier calculated that his death had occurred in 1980. However, if Rowling was serious about the dates on the sketch, it is clear that if born in '61, he would have had to have started Hogwarts in '72, finished with the class of '79 and been dead by the end of the same year. We certainly got no indication, either then nor even directly from Kreacher's tale later, that he was killed while he was still a student. Although upon further examination of Kreacher's account in DHs, that must have been the case.

It is also now clear that the tapestry sketch's dates must be dismissed as unworkable due to their multiple direct contradictions to published canon. There is no way that he could still be 17 in '79 if he was born in '61. There is no reason to leave his death in '79 when the text of OotP puts it in '80.

We were also directly told in OotP that Sirius's parents threw every knut they could spare into layering protections on their home and apparently covered there in virtual hiding throughout the years of Voldemort's rise. However, upon the posting of the sketch of the tapestry mentioned above we discovered that

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Regulus and his father, Orion, supposedly died the in same year, and that Orion Black and his wife, Walburga, were never the Heads of the Family at all. Orion's father, Arcturus, outlived all of them. One has to wonder why Sirius did not mention this, for it would appear to be of some importance. At that point, we had no certainty as to whether Reggie predeceased his father or not. But by this time I am inclined to believe that he did not. That, indeed, he was not even approached for recruitment by the DEs until his father was safely dead.

In 1979. When Reggie was 16.



At this point I would like to digress into a speculation kicked off by one of my correspondents in the summer of 2022. He asked me whether it was feasible to regard those fanboy scrapbooks as research, and to consider the possibility that Regulus might have deliberately gone into the DE organization with an intent of doing it some damage.

Upon consideration, It's not an altogether unfeasible conjecture.

Mind you, I've no idea what it might say on Pottermore about the dates of any of these events these days. I've never really accepted Pottermore as a viable source. All my data is taken from the books themselves, the dodgy Black Family Tapestry sketch, Rowling's original official website, and interview statements, chiefly made before the series was complete.

But the tapestry sketch clearly says that Orion Black died in '79.

So, just for fun, let's consider the possibilities, and also try interweaving a few of my own extrapolations. Orion dies in '79. The death probably wasn't widely attributed to the Death

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Eaters, but someone, possibly Arcturus, suspects they were behind it. What is more, Reggie realizes he is being courted by them. Probably via Bellatrix. Reggie starts plotting revenge. Without consulting anybody, he comes up with his dashing master of espionage plan, and as Kreachur tells us, gets himself marked at the age of 16.

I still have trouble accepting Tom Marking kids who are still in school as a normal practice, but exceptions are clearly made, Reggie is the designated heir of the House of Black. That is something that would be worth making an exception for.

As of something like November 1979, Tom is made aware that there is a prophecy out there concerning his downfall. To this point, his collection of Horcruxes (other than the Ring) has been sitting safely in some undisclosed location. He decides to split up the collection. First, he entrusts the Cup to Bellatrix, and it takes her over within a month.

Well, Tom manages to get her free of it and orders her to put it in her vault, well away from her. But it's not like she got any kind of counseling afterwards, and her behavior becomes steadily less stable afterwards. Indeed she is never quite the same.

Bella is Reggie's cousin and I suspect something of a favorite niece of Walburga's.

Reggie is a close enough family member to have been on the periphery and regards it as another attack on his family. He may not have a clue regarding the Cup, but the possession would have been evident enough to be noticeable by pretty much anyone in contact with her. None of Tom's Horcruxes are backwards about being forward, after all.

Reggie, being a Slytherin and a member in good standing of

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the Slug Club, privately brings the matter up with his Head of House.

This account frightens Slughorn out of his wits, but he does identify the probable cause to be a case of possession. The most likely source to be due to a cursed artifact. Which probably would send Reggie to whatever library is available to find out what sort of a cursed artifact could manage to possess someone.

Well, we know he doesn't find anything to the purpose at Hogwarts. But the Black family library doesn't have the same limitations. He finds out about Horcruxes and concluded that Tom has created one.

Tom's request for the loan of a House Elf must have taken place at very much at the same time. Probably during Hogwarts's Christmas Break. Soon enough after the Cup debacle for Tom to conclude that his Horcruxes need to be stowed where people won't casually encounter them. But not so long after Bella's misadventure that Reggie would conclude that this was a *different* Horcrux than the one that damaged Bella.

Actually, let's reexamine the timing on this whole sequence: given that Reggie is still in school, much of the problem with Bella may have taken place off his radar and Reggie only heard of it from his mother through letters, and only saw the result when he got home for the Christmas break. Voldemort's request for the "loan" of a House Elf taking place at some point during the same break.

We might also want to take a second look at those orders he gave Kreachur — that Kreachur was to return once he had completed whatever task Lord Voldemort might have for him — and admit the possibility that Reggie was already gathering

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information on his Lord's doings. The attack on Kreachur was the last straw for Reggie. But he wasn't able to determine that the Locket in the cave was a Horcrux until he had access to the Black library again during the Spring break.

Reggie may not have the chance to have attempted research on the problem at Hogwarts. Although I suspect he did mention the disturbing reports of Bella from his mother to Slughorn.

After Christmas break Reggie returned to Hogwarts with more uncomfortable questions for Slughorn and a research project. *Something* prompted Slughorn to begin considering retirement around this point, and of perhaps embarking on a long-deferred Grand Tour outside of Britain.

From Kreachur's account, Reggie's raid on the Locket was not a well-planned approach. He may have decided that he needed to accomplish it before returning to school, and had not accounted for the possibility that the potion in the basin might not affect House Elves the same way as it affected humans.

He does not survive to return to Hogwarts.

Slughorn, meanwhile is thoroughly frightened by the implications of Regulus's questions. And his subsequent disappearance and rumored death only makes it worse. He also remembers just what kind of questions Tom had been asking back in the mid-'40s. He is an abject coward, but he is certainly bright enough to put 2+2 together. He spends the next year dithering, and if Albus also starts asking inconvenient questions, he's done.

The fact that Snape takes up the post of Potions Master at Hogwarts in September of the following year, is in itself, *suggestive*

Yeah, I think there is certainly a sufficiency of possibilities available to could support a reading of "Regulus's Revenge."

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A reconsideration of the problem posed by the absentee Head of the House of Black suggests a comfortably non-dramatic possible solution to *that* conundrum, at least.

Arcturus Black, the Head of the family, may have simply chosen to live with his married — and childless — daughter Lucretia, leaving the townhouse to his son, Orion, and his growing family, since Orion's branch of the family would inherit it eventually, and the boys could then be brought up in the Black family's primary London residence.

Particularly if Arcturus had been widowed by that time. It should be noted that nowhere in what we have of the Black family tapestry sketch has any member of the family ever embarked upon a second marriage. It is possible that among the most narrowly pureblooded circles such a practice would be frowned upon, due to the extreme shortage of eligible prospective marriage partners already. It should also be noted that a fairly high number of the Black family in every generation appear to have remained unwed. A lack of enough eligible potential partners is probably the cause of this as well.

I'll have to say that in Arcturus's place, given the choice of living with a childless (or possibly even widowed) daughter and the shrieking Walburga and her two screaming infants, I certainly know which residence I would choose.

But then we were also handed the oddity of the fact that Sirius Black seems to have inherited that house, despite having been blasted off the family tapestry and not (so far as we could tell) reinstated.

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For the House was certainly the property of Sirius Black by the time Harry was escorted there in the summer of 1995. If, at the point that HBP was released, the property had automatically passed to the next male with the surname of Black still listed on the tapestry, then upon Arcturus's death in 1991, it ought to have passed to his first cousin Pollux's younger son Cygnus, the father of the three Black sisters, who was originally recorded in the sketch as having survived until the following year. Yet it appears to have done nothing of the sort.

At this point Real Life interrupts all of our speculations with the information that a full year after posting their version of the tapestry sketch with the dates of Cygnus Black, Sirius's uncle and the three sisters' father, recorded as 1938–1992, the HP Lexicon abruptly changed these dates to 1929–1979, duplicating those of his 2nd cousin Orion's.

I do not know the original source of this change. The Lexicon is understood to have taken them from a tour of the film set and a close look at the prop tapestry that was to be used in the film. But we do not know where the film designers got their numbers. The numbers are assuredly not in the books themselves, and may not even be from Rowling.

The adjustment does, however, resolve a couple of problems which were built into the chronology as depicted in the original sketch. First, it gets rid of one of the 13-year-old fathers which had been the cause of so much hilarity, and exasperation, across the fandom since the sketch was released. And it does resolve the problem of Sirius Black inheriting the house. If Cygnus Black were to have died at any point before about 1980, then it would be clear that apart from Arcturus himself,

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and his cousin Pollux, both of them well into their elder years (and, just possibly, Marius the Squib), Sirius would have been the only male Black left. And the choice was either to reinstate him as heir, or to see their name become extinct upon their own deaths. At *that* point there was still no stain upon Sirius's character (regardless of his political stance and his supposed rejection of Dark magic), and it might have still been hoped that the boy would settle down and marry eventually.

Plus, as we discovered early in HBP, the Black family holdings could be left by a formal will to someone who was not on the tapestry. And even the family House Elf could not gainsay such a will. Indeed it now seems likely that this might have been done in Sirius's case as well as Harry's. Certainly Kreacher's service to Sirius Black was every bit as grudging as it initially was to Harry. Sirius, after all, was not on the tapestry, either. Not any more.

So, despite the prior disowning of the elder son of the family, and the death of the younger son and their father (and, evidently, the last surviving male cousin), upon the previous Head of the Family's death, the property did not pass to Walburga's eldest niece, Bellatrix Lestrange.

This seems most likely to have been both deliberate, and to have been old Arcturus Black's doing, for all that Sirius dismisses his grandfather at every mention.

Apparently this is one of those stories "between the lines" of the tapestry which Rowling has left it to us to fill in for ourselves.

And for the moment, at least, I suppose we will just have to let the film designers' adjustments to the tapestry stand.



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Which brings us to Bellatrix.

She doesn't come across as an exceptionally clever woman, does she?

She's not particularly discrete, either. Can't resist boasting, in fact.

Even in Spinner's End among people who know the truth of the matter, she can't resist airing her own importance. *"He shares everything with me! He calls me his most loyal, his most faithful —" "...The Dark Lord has, in the past, entrusted me with his most precious — if Lucius hadn't —"*

Wait a minute. Run that one past us again. The Dark Lord has, in the past, entrusted this loose cannon with his "most precious..."

Most precious *what?*

We know he entrusted Lucius with a Horcrux.

And, so, much belated, another penny finally dropped. Someone posted on the HogwartsProfessor.com discussion boards a quote that makes it clear that in HBP Dumbledore comes right out and *tells* us that Lucius was only entrusted with the Diary Horcrux shortly before Voldemort's first defeat. Which is to say, not until 1981. To wit:

In response to a statement of Harry's that it had been Voldemort who had wanted the Diary smuggled into the school, Albus's response was:

"Yes, he did, years ago, when he was sure he would be able to create more Horcruxes, but still Lucius was supposed to wait for Voldemort's say-so, and he never received it, for Voldemort vanished shortly after giving him the diary..." (HBP, US hard-cover edition, page 506)



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Which raises the previously unasked question as to just when Voldemort actually hid his Horcruxes.

We'd assumed that he hid them when he made them.

It now looked like we may have been wrong about that.



And now, excuse me, but we are going to go skittering off and chase wild geese down blind alleys for a bit. I'll bring this back on track eventually.

Albus tells us that Riddle allegedly likes things that come complete with a history, with a tradition, with some level of grandeur as bases for his Horcruxes. That's why he was so eager to use relics associated with the Founders themselves.

Well, that's certainly why he was *eventually* so eager to use artifacts associated with the Founders for bases for his Horcruxes.

But when you stop to think of it, the first three Horcruxes that we were told about were primarily significant only in their connections to *himself*. It seemed to have been only when poor, silly Hepzibah Smith waved the Hufflepuff cup under his nose that he decided to branch out and collect a whole set.

(ETA: Well, okay, after the fact, now that we know that Godric's Sword had a habit of turning up in emergencies, and that Tom had already sweet-talked the general location of the Ravenclaw diadem out of the ghost of Helena Ravenclaw before he finished at Hogwarts. He may have been considering using Founders' relics for *some* of his Horcruxes, even before Hepzibah waved the cup at him. But I suspect the cup's turning up was a complete surprise. Having come down through Hepzibah's family it wouldn't have been in any records accessible to B&B.)



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But grandeur and antiquity are clearly what he prefers, if he can get it.

I'll bet he likes that kind of thing in the guardians for his Horcruxes as well. When he entrusts them to guardians, that is. Which he really doesn't do all that often.

The Blacks, after all, are a very *old* family.

And there is no question that Bellatrix is *utterly* loyal.

And it certainly turns out that we were on the right track in suspecting that she also had custody of one of the Horcruxes. I was just a bit off-target regarding which one.



Dumbledore appears to have never questioned the reading that Voldemort created the inner chamber of the sea cave in which the Locket was allegedly first hidden. But Dumbledore admits that he makes mistakes. And that when he does they are apt to be huge ones. I thought this may turn out to be one of his mistakes, although if it was a mistake, it probably was not a truly significant one.

Nevertheless I suspect that the sea cave is far, far older than Tom Riddle.

It is certainly designed to a far older tradition.

We already know that Voldemort likes to pay return visits to the scenes of what he regards as his triumphs. He takes possession of those places too, if he can. We know he returned to the Riddle house, and by the time of his first defeat he probably already owned it. He returned to the Gaunt hovel to hide the Ring, unless he entrusted that job to an underling — which I very much doubt — and he probably owned the Gaunt prop-



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erty too. At least it would probably say as much if you went looking through the Muggle land records.

And, if he also returned to the sea cave in which he had terrorized two of his fellow orphans, he may well have realized upon his return as an adult, as Albus did, that this was a place that had “known magic.”

It is not difficult, rereading Dumbledore and Harry's journey into that cave, to draw the conclusion that the potion Dumbledore had to drink to reveal the Horcrux forced him to relive every action and every mistake he had ever made over a very long life.

That, in particular, he was forced to relive any action that exacted a cost from others, particularly in the suffering of innocents. For, to Dumbledore (at least as we *thought* we knew him) those would have been his very worst memories.

(Relived his very worst memories? And ended in a suicidal despair?)

And it ultimately would have ended, indeed, it may have ended, in drawing the soul out of his body.

(That progression sounds awfully familiar, you know. Where have we heard of something like that before...)

Or, conversely, it has been postulated elsewhere that the potion caused him to relive whatever may have been done in that place by others

Or to see the *future* consequences of his own actions.

But whatever it actually *did*, I really, really doubted that this was quite the fountain's original purpose or function. It had been tainted.

Such fonts of knowledge, or of self-knowledge, or of wisdom



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(or unwelcome truths) go back in folklore for a very, very long way. And they are usually tucked away in secret places very much like that sea cave.

And such places in folklore are often *womens'* places. Or places under the protection of priestesses. And the "crudeness" of the door that demanded a payment in blood for entry (another bit of female-related symbolism) may be less an indication of the shallowness of Tom Riddle's character, than of the age of the place that he had co-opted for his own purposes. Very old magic is often tied to blood. Only consider the sort of protection that Lily left upon Harry. And which Dumbledore compounded by adding an additional layer of protection based upon Lily's family's blood.

Albus Dumbledore, after all, was an authority on blood magic. (Pot? I'd like you to meet my dear friend, Kettle.)

Plus that inner cave is just too blooming big, and seems too thumping old to have been built from scratch less than 50 years ago by an upstart like Riddle.

But it's not a foregone conclusion that it was Bellatrix who told Tom about the cave and assisted him in his defiling of it; filling the lake with Inferi and poisoning the knowledge that the font provided (although if the font was originally of the variety that contributes to personal enlightenment, then it is self-renewing, and it must have been poisoned at its wellspring).

For one thing that would imply that Voldemort didn't hide his Horcrux in that cave until after Bellatrix was out of Hogwarts, and since we'd been told she was born in 1951 (in the Autumn too, probably), she would not have finished at Hogwarts until 1970, about a decade after he had already returned to the ww

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and had already launched his rise to power. Which sounded an unlikely progression.

But not an impossible one. Hold that thought.



Since the Locket had probably already been converted into a Horcrux before Tom Riddle's first return to wizarding Britain — which had taken place by the early 1960s — you might have expected him to have put the Horcrux into the cave before his public return as well.

But we have nothing to tell us he did so (and post-DHs we know for certain that he didn't). He may just as easily have stashed the whole collection someplace secure, in order to gloat.

After all, he would have hardly been the first wizard with a collection of such "objects of virtue." There would have been nothing even remotely remarkable in that. Not even if the objects were suspected of being stolen. And even if someone got the bright idea that one of them might be a Horcrux, they would hardly have leaped to the conclusion that *five* of them were. (Or, four, more likely. The Diary was probably tucked away in his sock drawer, and not out on display. It may not even have been a Horcrux yet.)

However, one of the things we do not know of Tom between his return to Great Britain around the time of his abortive "job interview" with Dumbledore, and the point at which he was hiding the Locket in the sea cave around 1979–80, is whether he had a known place of residence.

We've certainly heard nothing of one. The Riddle House in Little Hangleton was being looked after by Frank Bryce, and

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was presumably vacant. And by the mid-'60s the Ministry allegedly was actively attempting to find and take custody of this "Lord Thingy" person. So it really doesn't sound like he had anywhere that would have counted as a stable place to be displaying his collection of treasures. So we may as well conclude that until we hear otherwise (unlikely) he had most of them stashed out of sight in a place of safety.

With the exception of the Ring, which I think he had probably hidden in the ruins of the Gaunt hovel, as a trap for his uncle Morfin, before he left Britain in search of the diadem. But that's something to be discussed in a different essay.

The fact that he couldn't have handed the Diary over to Lucius until Lucius left Hogwarts with the class of '72 or '73 suggests that distributing the Horcruxes into other hands, or off to separate secure hiding places must have been a fairly late development. With little, on the face of it, to suggest why he should have so abruptly done such a thing.

Unless he didn't do it until the end of 1979, or early 1980.

The year 1979 has not, to our knowledge, ever been directly mentioned in the course of the books. But we had at least two statements, one from Sirius Black (which has since been rewritten) and one from Severus Snape, which when added up land us in that year.

As well as a controversial piece of known Ministry policy which is as likely to have been instituted in that year as not.

And right about Halloween of 1979 is also the earliest probable date that Sybill Trelawney is likely to have made her first Prophecy. If, that is, the Prophecy was made around the time of the child it foretold's conception. And while this is far from a

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done-deal, I have used this possibility as a base point for many of the theories throughout this collection.

Because if that's the case: that it was around, or just after the end of 1979 that Tom Riddle suddenly started distributing his Horcruxes into safe hiding places, then we have a very good idea why he might have suddenly chosen to diversify his "insurance."

That's right. He started hiding them when he learned that he was the subject of a bona-fide Prophecy. One regarding his own downfall.

But the cave itself might not have been a secret from the Death Eaters at all. Riddle manifestly had another use for that cave, one which he might well have shared with them.

Or did he?



Which sends us back to the problem of Regulus, and how he discovered that there was a Horcrux in that cave (if he ever did, and if there ever was), and how he managed to get the Horcrux out of the cave. And whether he ever told anyone of what he was doing. Or why.

It's not, after all, information that he had anything to gain by keeping it to himself. Not if Sirius's version of the matter is right and Voldemort had already ordered his death. But, so far, an awful lot of Voldemort's enemies, Albus Dumbledore first and foremost among them, seem to be determined to keep Tom's secrets for him, in clear defiance of any kind of common sense. Whether this general epidemic of folly is intentional on Rowling's part or not I could not say.

And, intentional or not; we had tacitly also been told some-

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thing else fairly significant about this particular problem.

Regulus also seems to have known that the Horcrux in the cave was a *locket*. He may even have known *whose* locket. Leading me to wonder whether Bellatrix may only be a competent Occlumens when she knows she is being tested. Or if Reggie came across this information by accident when she was teaching Occlumency to him.

It is an idea, certainly. But by that time I doubted it was the right one.

Still, that decoy locket had to have been prepared in advance. Can you seriously imagine that Regulus got into the cave, made his way to the island, managed somehow to drink the potion and discover; “Damn! I’m going to have to raid Mum’s jewelry box and make another trip!” Or even that he just transfigured a pebble into a locket, arbitrarily pulled a piece of parchment, a quill and bottle of ink (which he *just happened* to have on him) out of his pocket and composed his “Boo! Sucks!” message at the last moment? Scribbling it out on the edge of the basin? Hardly.

Which brings one back around to the question of why Voldemort should have chosen to share the location of *any* of his Horcruxes, with anyone else in the first place. The Diary, which was also a weapon, could have been an exception (or was it?). It needed to be kept safe, but it also needed to be kept where it could be easily retrieved, against the time he decided to deploy it. For he clearly intended to deploy it eventually.

But why would Tom share information, *any* information *at all*, about any of the others? And yet it seems as if he must have shared it with *somebody*, or how would a wet-behind-the-ears rookie Death Eater like Regulus Black ever manage to find out

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enough about it to figure it out?

Regarding the bigger puzzle, however; how did Regulus manage to *steal* the Horcrux?



As of where we were standing at the end of HBP, on that issue we had to thread our way through a whole jungle of questions.

First: did he actually succeed in what he intended? Had that Horcrux already been destroyed? Was the Horcrux the locket itself, or something that was *in* the locket?

For that matter, was it the Locket at all? In that kind of a *mise-en-scène*, wouldn’t you have expected the Horcrux in the basin to be the Cup? You cannot see what is in the bottom of the basin through that potion. All you can see is the glowing green potion. It’s opaque. (Or is it? Maybe not. Maybe it’s just reflective.) Maybe R.A.B. just used a locket for his fake Horcrux because a locket would protect *his* message from the potion.

For all the information we had at that point, the sea cave Horcrux could even have been the “mystery Horcrux” about which we had no textual clues at all.

Conversely, did Regulus only manage to steal the Horcrux and substitute the decoy? The message in the decoy locket must have been prepared ahead of time. It tells us what he *intended* to do, but not whether he lived long enough to accomplish it.

Regarding this particular issue there had been no shortage of fans to have pointed out that, early in OotP, a heavy locket which no one could open, was found in one of the display cases in the parlor of #12 Grimmauld Place along with a cursed music

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box and any number of other items, all of which Sirius Black threw out. If that locket was the real Horcrux we would have a fine time trying to find out what became of it. There was no shortage of possibilities.

Just for starters:

It had been thrown out and may now be in anybody's hands, or even in a landfill (or whatever the Brits in London do with their rubbish).

Mundungus Fletcher may have stolen and sold it. Or kept it. And now he was off in Azkaban for impersonating an Inferi. We don't know what happened to his stash. Albus might have even retrieved it already.

Aberforth might have bought it off of Dung when Dung was peddling his swag on the streets of Hogsmeade.

Kreacher may have rescued it from the trash and hidden it in his nest.

And, for my own part, by this time, I was inclined to agree that the mystery locket from Grimmauld Place probably was the Horcrux. It was a little late in the series to be introducing an additional wild goose chase, when we already have four of the bloody things to sort out and only one book left to do it in. But I'd been wrong on any number of other points up to that date. That particular locket could still turn out to just be a locket.

For that matter, since Regulus was clearly expecting to die soon when he wrote his message, just what time frame are we dealing with? Was he already on the run? It does sound like it. Or did he simply expect to die, sooner rather than later, of the potion? Or for some other reason altogether?

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For that matter, as has been asked elsewhere online; did Regulus manage to fake his death, and then go back to remove the Horcrux from the cave after Voldemort fell? By then he would have had all the time in the world to figure out how to get at it. Plus, if he knew about the Horcrux, he would have known that Voldemort wasn't really dead, which would explain the wording of his note.

Second: did he actually escape from the cave with the Horcrux, to be hunted down later by one of the other Death Eaters and killed as reported? Or was the report of his death only assumed to have meant that he had been murdered, presumably on Voldemort's orders? Was he actually killed destroying the Horcrux? If so, does Voldemort know this?

Did Regulus even make it out of the cave alive? We saw that there was at least one wizard in that lake. And if Reggie is sleeping with the Inferi, is the real Horcrux in the lake with him?

Well, not necessarily. Regulus Black was the son of a family that owns a House Elf. He was one of Kreacher's masters. A House Elf's master can summon him. In fact, can summon him almost instantaneously. From almost any location. Indeed, TO any location.

House Elves can also Apparate and Disapparate where wizards cannot. If Regulus got to that island alone, and got himself into trouble, he probably could have called on Kreacher, to help him, or at least could have passed him the locket and told him take it away and to guard it, if he could not destroy it. In which case, Regulus probably is in the lake with the Inferi.



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And as a possibly related side issue — or perhaps just another point of confusion: we have known the number of Sirius Black's Gringotts' vault since PoA.

It is vault number 711. Number 713 is possibly the School's, but it is generally believed to have been Nicholas Flamel's.

Who lived to be nearly 700 years old.

So how far back does that genealogical tapestry in the parlor of the house in Grimmauld Place trace the Black family again? Oh, that's right. About 700 years.

That isn't Sirius Black's *personal* vault. That's the Black *family's* vault.

And now it's Harry's.

And if Reggie, dying, passed the Horcrux to Kreachur and told him to hide it safely where no one could get at it, would Kreachur necessarily have hidden it in the house?

Would Reggie's family?

And, maybe, just maybe, Voldemort *did* entrust the Locket to Bellatrix, and it was *not* the cave Horcrux. And Bellatrix eventually entrusted it to her Aunt Walburga rather than take it with her into Azkaban. Or, she simply she wasn't permitted to take jewelry with her into Azkaban. Walburga Black was still alive when Bellatrix was sentenced to Azkaban, after all.

In which case, Bella may have had her own reasons to be asking Snape about the secret headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix in the Spinner's End chapter of HBP. And maybe the fact that she doesn't still have custody of that Locket is one of the reasons that she is no longer very high in Voldemort's favor.

But I can't see any way the logistics of this script accounts for the locket in the cave.

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Speaking of which; the very fact that it was *Kreachur*, an elf that everyone in the Black family knew, who was dancing all around Robin Hood's barn attempting to pass information about the Order of the Phoenix to Narcissa that would have given the Malfoys a mighty strong hint of just where those Headquarters were. (And just what happened to *that* thread in the official Kreachur backstory?)

And now the Order's Secret Keeper is dead.

Rowling informs us that this does not change anything.

Convenient, that.



But, I digress (frequently):

Third: if Regulus anticipated the possibility that whatever he ran into in that cave might be something too big for him to handle on his own and took somebody with him in the first place, who did he go with? Did he take Kreachur with him? That would have assured an accomplice who would not give his game away. House Elves cannot directly betray their masters' secrets.

Did he send Kreachur to fetch him a bezoar when he realized that there was a potion to be neutralized? Are House Elves immune to the potion in the Birdbath of Doom? Is drinking that potion on Reggie's orders why Kreachur now acts like he is $\frac{2}{3}$ round the twist and no longer even tries to take care of the house of the family to which he was apparently devoted? What is a House Elf's purpose in life? Kreachur seems to have misplaced his.

And if Reggie did not go to the cave with Kreachur, and did not go alone, who did he go with? And where is that person now?

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On the issue of who went with Reggie into the sea cave, if Reggie is really dead, and if his tale really needs to be told, and he didn't go with Kreachur, and we can take Rowling at her word that we've already met all of the major players in this cast of dozens, we haven't got a particularly wide field of possibilities, do we? In fact, we may be looking at a vast field of... one.

Yup. Him again. Our generic, all-purpose Man of Mystery, and Rowling's favorite red herring



Right about this point I found myself having one of my "wait a minute..." moments. There was something screwy going on here. And I could tell that I was clearly missing something.

From a strictly meta standpoint I had a lowering feeling that we were all being set up. I was beginning to suspect that if Regulus Black got the Horcrux out of the cave we would be handed, at most, some half-baked solution that just plain doesn't work because it doesn't connect to anything. A solution that essentially comes out of thin air "because the author says so," without a proper backtrail that makes any kind of sense. Rather like the "confession" of Barty Crouch Jr. (ETA: HA! Called that one correctly. Go me!)

Or; we were not going to be handed any kind of a solution at all, because the whole adventure of Regulus Black and the Dark Lord's Sea Cave, is just one giant, gaudy, irresistible red herring.

And I had come round to thinking that the second was a very likely possibility.

Because, looked at from any rational standpoint, Regulus Black just plain Knew Too Much. He certainly knew too much

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for any wet-behind-the-ears new recruit, and there just wasn't *time* for him to have worked himself up through the ranks to be anything more than that.

He knew about the cave.

He knew where to find it.

He knew how to get into it

He knew about the Horcrux.

He seems to have known about the Horcrux being a locket.

HOW would he have known all of this? I was not convinced that he would have been able to learn all of this from Bellatrix. I wasn't convinced that Voldemort would have shared all of this with Bellatrix.

So let's take another look at the set-up, shall we?

And re-check our list..



He knew about the Horcrux. Check. He unquestionably knew about the Horcrux. He says so flat out in his "Screw you" message.

He seems to have known about the Locket. It really is hard to convince ourselves that his substitution was in the form of a locket by accident.

But *did* he know about the cave? How much did he know? And in what context?

What do we know about that sea cave that we can definitely trace to Lord Voldemort's influence on it — and no one else's? What is in the sea cave (other than the now-missing Horcrux) that we *know* Voldemort caused to be put there?

Not the blood-price door. Not the inner chamber. Like I say,

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I think both of those are much older than Tom Riddle. He found it, he took possession of it, and he made use of it. But we have no proof that he created it. I seriously doubt that he realized that there even was an inner chamber before his return visit there as an older teen or adult. He was only eleven, or — more probably — even younger, on his first trip there, and at that point he didn't even know that magic was real. Or that his power over the other children was magic.

Not the fountain, either I suspect. I think we can safely conclude that Voldemort tampered with the fountain, but mystic fountains in caves that have never seen the light of day are not that hard to cite in Real World folklore. The fountain, and the cave itself, might easily date back to Merlin's day, or earlier. The wonder is that Tom didn't come back and turn the Basin into a Horcrux. I would have. Founders, schmounders, if you want artifacts of historical significance for your Horcruxes, you don't get much more historical than that fountain. I mean, if you're going to be committing what amounts to blasphemy anyway...

Probably not the lake either. That's another traditional element, and the lake is clearly there to make access to the island and the fountain more difficult. Petitioners in such places of great Mystery such as that sea cave appears to be were *supposed* to find the access difficult, although not impossible. Or at least symbolic. And having to approach the fountain over water (*fresh* water, in a *sea* cave) from an antechamber that is only accessible at low tide, is the kind of symbolism that such quests usually entailed.

The boat. Now this is more like it. There probably has always been some kind of a boat in that cave, but it was probably not

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that boat. Dumbledore even tells us that he recognized Tom Riddle's style in that boat. So that was almost certainly his. But the boat in itself doesn't really get us much forwarder.

The Inferi *in* the lake.

Bingo.



Rereading the trip into the sea cave it is obvious that Dumbledore knew *exactly* what was lurking in that lake.

Before he and Harry even got into the inner chamber, Albus Dumbledore knew what was in that lake. He knew, from the outset, that they were going to have to bypass a lake full of Inferi. There was absolutely no question or hesitation in his statements or actions regarding what was floating about in that lake. He may try very hard to give us the impression that he never had been in that cave himself, but I just don't buy it. At the very least, he clearly had advance information about what was in that cave.

He also tells us that Voldemort "killed enough people to make an army of Inferi". Does he mean that he killed them all himself? Or that He and his followers killed enough people, on his authority and in his name to build themselves such an army?

For that matter, what kind of numbers, to a wizard, would constitute an "army"? Riddle has an "army" of Death Eaters, too. Which comes out to about 60, tops. The lake certainly sounds as if it is big enough to hold 5 or 6 dozen Inferi. Indeed, when Harry was trying to fight them off, the narrative even melodramatically refers to them as an "army of the dead."

So. Is this the *same* "army of Inferi"? How many armies of

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Inferi does your average Dark Lord *need*?

And furthermore we were told that the Voldemort's army of Inferi had been *used* "the last time." His followers, or at least some of them, almost certainly know about that cave and what is in that lake. He's not the only one.

Or is he?

Did he keep the secret of where the Inferi were stashed to himself? And only called them up when *he* wanted them used?

Well, maybe. No one has seen hide nor hair of them since he disappeared the first time, have they? So maybe he was the only one who could control them. And if that is the case, then anyone he might have told about it would have felt themselves to be very highly favored indeed, wouldn't they? And it's possible that no one was ever so favored.

For that matter, in the wake of DHs we don't even know whether the Inferi troops were even once put to use again after Riddle redirected them to Horcrux-guarding.

But it wasn't (and still isn't) exactly safe to assume that Tom was the only one who knew about the Inferi in that lake. Just that he seems to have been the only one who was ever willing to deploy them.

So. Okay. Do we know anything about the proper care and maintenance of Inferi? Can we make a *guess*?

Inferi are animate corpses. But they don't seem to be *rotting* corpses, although they do seem to be gradually withering, even under water — which may slow the process.

Actually, they sound to me as if Rowling lifted them straight out of the Mabinogion, where they are referred to as the "cauldron-born." So far as I can recall from Evangeline Walton's

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retelling of that tale, the Lord of the Dead (who isn't a bad guy, btw, just a grim one) gave as a gift to one of his mortal allies a giant magical cauldron large enough in which to lay the corpse of a man, and when this corpse had been "seethed" in the cauldron for the proper time, in the proper manner, it rose up and would obey its master.

(Now what does *that* description remind us of?)

In the original hero tale, in one of their wars somebody deployed such an army of cauldron-born. It was an exceedingly nasty battle. Being already dead, they couldn't be killed, and you had to hack them apart to stop them coming after you. In some retellings they would even collect and reform themselves overnight and come after you again the next day. The only way to destroy them was to destroy the cauldron which animated them.

Well, we already know that Rowling doesn't necessarily adopt things from her sources verbatim. She often tweaks them. Her Inferi actively seem to want to avoid light and warmth, and are apparently more comfortable if not exposed to air, either.

Well, they're dead. They probably want to be buried. So keeping them in a cave where the sun never shines is a reasonable thing to do. And if they want to feel enclosed, or contained, it's easier to call them out of water than it is to keep having to dig them up. And if you don't need them for long periods they are safe enough there.

Is that how Reggie knew about the sea cave? Was he the low-ranker that ended up having to play errand boy; periodically sent off to the sea cave to retrieve a few Inferi whenever his Master decided he wanted to make use of them?

Did Dumbledore and Harry just break into Voldemort's *garage*?

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Okay: back to square 1.

Let's play with some alternate possibilities.

We were originally invited to believe that at some point Regulus Black defied the Dark Lord. We are given the impression that either he refused orders, or he repudiated Voldemort and the whole Death Eater movement. In any case, he managed to get away without being killed right then and there, and he managed to keep ahead of the rest of them for a few days before somebody caught up to him and killed him.

Allegedly.

We were invited to believe that at some point during those few days he made a visit to the sea cave and retrieved the Horcrux, leaving a decoy. We don't know whether he managed to destroy the real one.

I am not convinced of that reading. It just plain doesn't make sense.

So let's try to dismiss considerations regarding the sea cave for the moment and concentrate on the other main component of the whole equation. Reggie himself.

From the tone of the note he left with the false Horcrux, I'd say that he repudiated Voldemort himself and his entire movement, and was determined to strike at least one telling blow against him before he died. That note doesn't sound particularly fearful, it sounds angry. And vindictive.

And, at that point, we still didn't know what set him off.

Or do we? Can we make a guess?

Regulus Black's flashpoint may have had nothing whatsoever

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to do with the Horcrux. The Horcrux is just what he knew he could use to strike the most damaging blow to Voldemort with. Something related to Voldemort himself evidently pushed Regulus Black's buttons and Madam Black's baby boy was going to do *damage*.

Well, we still don't really know for sure whether Rowling intended that Orion Black (or Cygnus) predeceased Regulus or not, do we? I think he (they?) did. That could turn out to be relevant.

The "Screw you!" message taunts the Dark Lord with the information that it was R.A.B. who "discovered your secret." I believed that Reggie must have done that before any alleged death warrant went out, since any few days on the run weren't likely to have been a good time to have been making major discoveries of other people's secrets.

But that discovery alone might not have prompted him to steal the thing.

Or did it?

Given how short a time Regulus was even in the organization (a maximum of six months, we first thought, Kreachur tells us a year), he must have been a very meddlesome little monkey indeed. Maybe he did go into the organization as another of Albus's spies — as some fans were contending. I'll admit I couldn't get properly enthusiastic about the idea myself, but it wasn't impossible. Going in as a self-directed saboteur, on the other hand, makes a degree more sense. Even if it was a completely half-baked idea from the get-go.

What was more likely, however, is that he had come across some very exclusive source of information that none of the other characters had anticipated.

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But, if he already knew about the cave, and knew about the Horcrux, (and knew about the locket?), how can we assume that he didn't also know about the fountain, and, consequently, know about the potion?

And since he seems to have known he was going to die anyway, would he have *cared* about the potion, beyond making sure that he wouldn't be so disabled by it that he couldn't get away afterwards? Maybe he did take a bezoar into the cave with him.

Hm. We're stuck in the damn cave again.

Let's back up a bit farther, and try again.



Frankly, where the adventure of Reggie Black and the Dark Lord's Sea Cave was concerned, we had a whole cornucopia of possibilities to play with. Rowling had packed so many variables into this puzzle that I doubted that anybody's version was going to get it right. And that went for mine as well.

And, if the whole issue was a red herring, we were never going to find out, either.

So it was all ours to play with. A gift to the fanfic community. To say nothing of the theorists.

In any case: we could not overlook the possibility that the locket at #12 may not have got there by way of Regulus Black. Or not directly.

We also need to remember that Reggie's parents clearly loved him, and there is no reason to suppose that this love was not returned. Once he knew he had got himself marked for execution, he left home and never returned to Grimmauld Place lest he be followed and put his family in danger, too. And if his



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father was already dead, he would not want to endanger his mother as well.

Frankly, we don't really know why Regulus would have bolted from what was probably one the most secure houses in the UK, but the fact is that he did bolt. Rowling tells us so, right there in the books (ETA: and then later pretended she hadn't), and we have no choice but to accept this information as it is given. He was young. He may have panicked. I wasn't convinced that we would ever be filled in on the details.

And if Reggie stole the Horcrux from the cave, and passed it to Kreachur to hide, while he was actually on the run, he probably never managed to get to any place secure enough, long enough to summon Kreachur and have him bring him the Horcrux so he *could* destroy it, for fear that he might be overtaken before he could do it, and it might fall back into Voldemort's hands.



Dumbledore went out of his way to give Harry a strong impression that no one else knows about Voldemort's Horcruxes.

That would certainly be the soundest way to ensure that Voldemort got no hint that Dumbledore (or anybody *but* Dumbledore) has figured it out. But the fact is that there still are a few other people wandering around the landscape who clearly have scraps of information concerning the matter.

Such as Slughorn. Or for that matter, Pettigrew — if he got to Godric's Hollow early enough to have witnessed the spell that went wrong — whatever it was. (ETA: let alone being *right there* on hand — and probably drafted into service to assist in the creation of the Nagini Horcrux.) We also have no idea of



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just what information is lurking about in all of the private libraries of Dark Arts sympathetic families — like the Blacks. The subject was only banned at Hogwarts, and that comparatively recently. The truth is out there. Or at least the pieces are. If you know where to look.

Or know whom to ask. Horace Slughorn must be the very *last* person to whom the idea of creating a Horcrux would appeal, but he seems to have a sound enough grasp of the theory. And if the information was only banned at Hogwarts since Albus Dumbledore started agitating on the subject there is a good chance that just about *any* member of a generation older than Tom Riddle's might be just as conversant on them.

Certainly in a family of traditionally Dark wizards, anyway.

But Albus also made a vigorous effort to convince Harry that even he *himself* had no proof of the possibility until Harry had handed him the Diary four years earlier. And I tend to think that this may have been another case of Albus shaving the truth according to his audience. And once again, I thought the intention behind this misdirection was probably in order to shield Snape, whose welfare Albus does not entrust to Harry.

Because **at that time** I tended to think that even if Snape didn't know the full text of the Prophecy, he did know about the Horcruxes. I was sure that he at least knew what kind of information Albus had him *looking* for. Otherwise what was the *point* of his being a spy? Particularly if the goal was to remove Tom Riddle?

If Regulus Black really did manage to steal a Horcrux and fake his death, as had frequently been proposed, then Albus's "official story" was obviously inaccurate, whether he was aware of

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that or not. Either Albus did not know about it, or this was classified information that he was not yet ready to reveal to Harry.

And if Dumbledore was directly involved in Reggie's alleged (i.e., faked) death, then the probability was that Dumbledore had known that there *had* to be more than one Horcrux ever since the attack on Harry in 1981, because the Horcrux from the cave would probably have already been destroyed — and yet, at Godric's Hollow, Voldemort still did not die.

What is more, if Dumbledore was involved in the disappearance of Regulus Black, the probability is that Snape was involved as well. Ergo; Snape was also aware of the fact that Voldemort had achieved deathlessness by the use of multiple Horcruxes. This was absolutely not information that Albus was going to share with anyone else one moment before he *had* to.

Under this particular scenario, we don't know how much Regulus Black told Albus about the Horcrux. Presumably as much as he knew.

Which all raised the outside possibility that Reggie's Horcrux *had* already been destroyed, and if so, it may *not* have been the Locket, since the Locket seemed to still be around.

But, in that case you would have expected Albus to have told Harry about it, so as not to waste his time on that one. Therefore, we could not assume any of this. And, even if Albus was involved, if he did not regard Reggie's story as his secret to tell, he would have kept silent about it. Which may be the crux of the matter.

He would certainly keep silent if he went to the trouble to "disappear" Reggie in order to keep him safe. And that goes double if any hint of Reggie's faked death would seriously endanger Snape — who may have taken credit for it.

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Or, if Reggie was hidden under Fidelius, Dumbledore may not have been his Secret Keeper. Snape was. Dumbledore knew the secret, but could not reveal it. I'll admit that I liked this possibility. But I wasn't going to be disconsolate if it should turn out to be wrong.

I thought that there was also a strong probability that Snape had also been shown the Pensieve presentation on the life and times of Tom Marvolo Riddle. With the notable exception of Slughorn's memory, since Albus did not have access to that one until Harry managed to retrieve it.

Indeed, Slughorn may have been shown bits of that collection after Riddle's first disappearance, too. Specifically the memory of the Gaunt family at home. Marvolo Gaunt made quite an issue of being descended from Salazar Slytherin. The current Head of Slytherin would not have been an inappropriate place to start asking questions regarding the puzzle of who *are* these people? And you have to admit that Sluggy would be a very good place to start asking questions about any of the "old families." He carries on as if he has a dossier on all of them.

And Snape may very well have been shown this series when he was about Harry's age, or not all *that* much older. If Snape did go into the DEs as Albus's agent, Dumbledore should have wanted his agent to be prepared for what he was going into. And to understand just what kind of information they were really looking for.

For that matter, Albus may not have even needed to bring up the subject of Horcruxes to Severus Snape. We're talking about a fledgling Dark wizard who was brought up with access to a fairly extensive book collection. Those books at Spinner's End are described as old books. I think the core of that collec-

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tion was his grandparents'. The subject of Horcruxes certainly wasn't banned at Hogwarts (or anywhere else) in their day.

Albus may have needed to do no more than to state that Riddle's goal was immortality. Snape may have needed no more information than that to connect the dots. Although he probably wouldn't have assumed there to be more than one of the things. Albus may not have either, at first. But I still don't believe it took him until the year of the Basilisk to figure it out.

And if we accept that Snape already knew about the existence of the Horcruxes, Albus would have shown him Slughorn's memory as well, once he had it. So they both would have a clear idea of what they were up against.

We have a loop here; if we discover that Reggie is alive, we will find out that it was supposedly Snape who finally "ran him to earth" and killed him. And, conversely; if we find that it was Snape who ran him to earth, we will probably discover that he is still alive.

IF Reggie is still alive.

I did rather think that if he was, it was Snape who first offered him the opportunity to really rock the boat, do some damage, and slip off the game board, undetected.

And, if Reggie is alive, Snape is most likely to have taken him to Dumbledore, who "disappeared" him, after learning at least a basic outline of the issue of the Horcrux, and possibly the sea cave layout.

If Reggie was ever there himself.

If.

Way too much "if?"

Because Albus may not have known anything about Reggie's

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activities, whatsoever. And we cannot assume that he did.



Back to the drawing board:

For the year or so before the release of DHs, I had been keeping in reserve the possibility that it was the news of Reggie's death which might have been the last straw for Snape, who had been inside the organization long enough to be realizing that it was a monumental scam, with no purpose apart from mindless violence, and went to Dumbledore himself soon afterwards.

This theory no longer played once DHs was out.

Indeed, by the time the release of DHs was pending, all of those particular scripts related to Reggie escaping or being found out by Snape had receded into the realm of implausibility.

Because with the reminder that the Diary was only passed to Lucius Malfoy in '81, the possibility was raised that Riddle only distributed his Horcruxes into hiding places and to guardians after he had learned about the first Trelawney Prophecy.

And in that case, Regulus Black and his sad story had nothing to do with Snape's loyalties. Because the way I was reading the information from HBP, the indications were that Snape was already working with Albus by the time the Prophecy was made. Instead, Reggie's death would have been the first death to have occurred as a direct result of the release/escape of the partial Prophecy.

And, if so, the real question was whether Snape and Albus were aware of that. They may not have been. They do not *need* to have been



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In this scenario, the Prophecy would have to have been made roughly around Halloween, 1979, just about the time of the child it foretold's conception. The Horcruxes would have been sent into their hiding places at any point after the Prophecy was reported, over the ensuing two years. Reggie Black unquestionably died during this period.

Which also means that we (and Harry) might have a better chance of tracing the Horcruxes if they were only hidden around the time Harry was born, rather than decades earlier. And one wonders whether, on the strength of having reported the partial Prophecy, Severus Snape ranked high enough to be given the responsibility of hiding one of them.

(Is that how Albus knew to go directly to the ruins of the Gaunt's hovel and retrieve the Ring as soon as he was ready to launch Operation Horcrux? Perhaps. But I tend to doubt it.)

However, if the locket we saw in Grimmauld Place was the Horcrux from — or originally assigned to — the sea cave, then whoever's faked death was due to be revealed in the course of book 7 (if anyone's) it would probably not be Reggie's.

If the Locket from #12 was the Horcrux, then Reggie's faked death was no longer necessary to the story arc. That Horcrux was no longer in the cave (or never had been there in the first place). Consequently, we did not *need* to hear Reggie's story. That's a false trail. A red herring. How — or if — he got the Horcrux out of the cave doesn't matter, either. It doesn't matter how he knew it was there, it doesn't matter how he got it out. He got it out, or kept it out, he either destroyed it, or he didn't, and hid it in, or sent it to Grimmauld Place for safety, and boogied off. End of story.



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If the locket from #12 was the sea cave Horcrux; from the structure of the series to date it also probably had not been disarmed yet. And finding Reggie or what happened to him wasn't going to tell us squat about where it had got to now.

If the Locket from Grimmauld Place is the Horcrux from the sea cave, it doesn't matter whether Reggie died failing to disarm it, was killed by DEs, as reported, or faked his death and made his escape from wizarding Britain and is now living under the name of Stubby Boardman on a houseboat in Sausalito. He isn't needed and he won't be back.

All that needs to happen is that his name be identified as R.A.B. And we don't need to bring him back on stage to do that.

What we *need* to know is what *happened* to the Horcrux.



And, now let's go back to the drawing board, yet again, and start over from the beginning.

And see what is behind Door #3:

This one has been freely adapted from an earlier theory which was first posted in the hp_essays community and on the LiveJournal of a fan going by the name of Professor_Mum.

And I have to admit that I really like this one.

It's based upon a consideration that I had completely missed, but it has rapidly become my theory of preference. This reading isn't altogether watertight either. In fact it had a major gap in it for which we had no certain context to use as a plug. At least not then.

The gap was the premise that although Voldemort almost certainly created all of the Horcruxes #s 1-4 by the end of his 10-year exile from the wizarding world, if the theory is to work, he did not

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assign them to their hiding places until much later. Decades later.

Since that point in time, that particular gap has been quite satisfactorily filled.

We had evidence to support this. Tom did not entrust Lucius Malfoy with the Diary until shortly before his first defeat. Prior to that point he must have kept the Diary among his own effects. Or in some hiding place known only to himself.

For that matter, I thought that maybe we ought to reevaluate our assumption that the Diary was the first Horcrux created, too. Maybe it wasn't #1 at all. Maybe it was #5. Maybe it was only created, as a weapon, at the point that Tom decided that he *needed* such a weapon.

But we won't do that here. This essay is only concerned with the Locket. The Diary had nothing to do with the Locket.

All that is necessary for us to accept as the basic premise for this particular reading of the events pertaining to the sea cave Horcrux is that Voldemort held onto Slytherin's Locket until some point after Halloween, 1979.

And that at some point after that date he entrusted it to Bellatrix to take and hide in a place of safety. It may have been her own idea to hide it in the basin in the cave that housed the Inferi, or he may have specifically instructed her to hide it there. He may have even provided her with a wineskin of the green potion to protect it with.

And he sent her because due to his own "singular appearance" he didn't get out much any more. Plus, it was getting on to winter, and he didn't fancy the swim to get to the ante-chamber, or that getting into that Cave, and getting over to the island was a rigmarole that he didn't feel like going through

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himself, out in the open where he might be spotted. She could demonstrate her loyalty by doing it for him.

And Bellatrix, being Bellatrix, could not resist making a stop at #12 and swaning about to her cousin Reggie on how much the Dark Lord *trusts* her — and generally boasting, and hinting, and making innuendos.

Yes, that's right.

Reggie substituted the Locket before it ever got to the sea cave. It never got any farther than #12 — until Sirius threw it out.



This particular playscript requires a very different set-up from the usual ones. But it is a much, much simpler set-up, and it doesn't require inventing unauthorized magic, or rewriting any of the rules of magic, either.

Some things to consider:

R.A.B. taunts the Dark Lord that "I discovered your secret!"

Tom Riddle has more than one secret, you know.

Why have we been assuming that this fatal secret was the secret of his Horcruxes?

Regulus was a member of the *Black* family. You, know, *those* Blacks. Dark wizards from the year dot one. This is a family that thinks beheading their servants is *normal*. And a *reward* to the servant. Is convinced that the mounted heads of outworn House Elves are a charming display of trust and devotion to their departed retainers. The kid's mother had a cousin who had actually been lobbying the Wizengamot to legalize Muggle hunting at some point in the last century and a half. Is he really going to blink at the idea of murdering somebody to create a Horcrux? Probably not.

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The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend.

Or Harry Potter's friend, either. We have been so desperately trying to find our one truly good Slytherin that we have been ignoring the odds.

R.A.B. wanted to strike a real blow at the Dark Lord. Good for him. This doesn't necessarily make him a hero on the side of the Light.

Yes, he had obviously figured out that the Dark Lord had created a Horcrux. Good for him. He was sharper than most of his associates.

This is also a kid who has been hearing about an "immortal" Dark Lord for most of his life. There are very few methods for attaining what passes for immortality.

The kid also had a Dark wizard for a grandfather to ask questions of, and access to a private Dark Arts library which does not have the imposed limitations that Albus Dumbledore has established off at Hogwarts. He also had the smarts to look it up. Good for him.

But that sure wasn't what had him seething to drag the Dark Lord down.

Consider: this is Walburga Black's precious baby boy. What, so far as we can tell from what we've been shown, was Madam Black's primary obsession?

Purity of blood, wasn't it?

What do you think a boy with that kind of a background's reaction is going to be when he discovers that his Leader is a literal halfblood?

After he has irrevocably bound himself to him.

With. No. Way. Out..

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For that matter, let's push this a bit farther down this same track, and go back to paying at least lip service to what Krea-chur has to tell us of the "official" tale of Regulus's death.

This has nothing to do with any theories to follow. But it might have a bit of light to shine on what supposedly happened in canon.

Lord Voldemort asked for the loan of a House Elf. A *loan*, not; "Will one of you *give* me a House Elf."

Reggie, hoping to gain favor, offered him the loan of Kreachur.

Reggie fully expected to get Kreachur back, and ordered him to return when he had finished the task his Lord asked of him.

And a good thing he did, or he'd probably never have seen the Elf again.

A House Elf is a valuable resource. And Kreachur appears to be the Black family's last surviving Elf.

Voldemort had treated Kreachur as *disposable*.

Sentimental attachment or not, that was outright disrespectful. In fact, insulting.

And, if I am correct about Bellatrix having been entrusted with the Cup around the same time, and later needed to be forcibly disentangled from it, that would hardly have passed unnoticed among her closer family members, either.

Reggie might just have caught on to the fact that to Lord Voldemort, **all** of his followers were disposable.

Reggie was a Black. That would not have gone down well.



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Sirius claims to have believed that his parents would think that their darling Regulus was a right little hero when he signed up with Lord Voldemort's army for the preservation and exaltation of "racial purity." But Sirius wasn't even capable of noticing what motivated one of his own roommates of seven years standing.

It also never seems to have occurred to him that for all his parents' pure-blooded snobbishness, they themselves were having no part of Voldemort's rising "Dark Order." All the while that Voldemort's star was steadily climbing into the heavens, they were nervously slapping layers upon layers of protection on their family home. Any possible significance of this behavior seems to have been totally lost on Sirius Black.

Professor_Mum believes that the Blacks had discovered something very important about the former Tom Riddle's background. I am inclined to agree with her.

Orion Black was of a perfect age to remember that "Lord Voldemort" had once been a nickname used by one of his schoolmates. A boy by the name of Tom Marvolo Riddle.

And that at some point around the time of Riddle's initial disappearance from the wizarding world, I think that both he, and his father Arcturus, had discovered that Tom Marvolo Riddle was a literal halfblood.

And a thief. And almost certainly a murderer.

I think that we can take it as given that Arcturus Black had Ministry connections. Connections good enough for him to recognize exactly when a donation to the Ministry exchequer would garner him an Order of Merlin, first class.

Riddle's halfblood background had undoubtedly turned up in the course of Albus Dumbledore's campaign to secure Morfin

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Gaunt's release from Azkaban, probably just before the point that a young shop assistant named Tom Riddle was suddenly absent from the British wizarding world. The evidence submitted in that campaign would have included a recovered memory which (with a translation from the Parseltongue) revealed that the afore-mentioned Riddle was almost certainly a parricide. And was definitely a thief.

And, oh yes, a halfblood.

(As well as being a Parselmouth, which even Slytherins tend to view a bit side-eyed.)

But Arcturus and Orion didn't have the presence of mind, or possibly the nerve, to speak up and publicly state that information and derail the "Lord Voldemort" hoax before it started building momentum.

Or, who knows, perhaps they did and were disbelieved. But once the so-called Lord Voldemort moved beyond making a laughingstock of the leaders of pureblood society and a number of odd, disturbing, *violent* incidents started being reported, Arcturus and Orion appear to have decided to turn their own attentions to protecting their own concerns rather than preaching to a congregation which wasn't listening. After which point they stopped attempting to convince anyone outside their own immediate circle of anything.

Possibly not even Walburga. It was suddenly just too dangerous to draw attention to oneself.

Orion had resisted any blandishments to join Riddle's movement early on, kept his head down and started layering protections on the family home. No doubt on his father's advice and with Arcturus's approval.

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It didn't occur to any of them that Riddle would manage to get his hooks into their children. Certainly not their precious Reggie. I think that had Orion lived to hear of it, Reggie's announcement that he had joined the DEs would have set off an explosion not much less violent than the one following the news that his brother Sirius had been a part of a disgraceful public display featuring an unprovoked attack on a fellow student witnessed by most of the Hogwarts student body. It certainly wouldn't have been the first time a teenager made a disastrous, life-altering decision without discussing the matter with his parents.

And Reggie's parents would have had no hope of being able to bail him out of the consequences of that decision. Even if it had been made while he was still underage.

Although if Orion was still alive at that time, he may have tried. Asked the wrong questions anyway. Or made the wrong comment in the wrong ears. And very soon *wasn't* still alive.

Given that Riddle had — on the surface — adopted the pure-blood isolationists' party line wholesale, how could Orion, a deliberate non-participant in Riddle's organization, have known which were the wrong ears? Possibly even his own brother-in-law's ears, now that we need to consider the matter of Cygnus's marriage to one of the Rosiers and his death occurring in the same year as Orion's. (Although there must have been no evidence suggesting that Cygnus was a DE at the time of his death, or you would think that we would have heard something of it.)

Just about every member of the Black family we have met or heard of (other than Tonks, and possibly Andromeda) seems to have a pronounced spiteful streak. Once they feel they have a

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grievance, most of them would happily cut off their own nose to spite their face, so long as it gives you a bloody nose as well. They also can't seem to resist mouthing off when they really ought to keep quiet.

So Orion dies of meddling, if he wasn't already dead before someone (cousin Bellatrix?) approached Reggie to recruit him. Reggie cannot be sure that his becoming a DE had anything to do with his father's death, but he's stuck, and doesn't know of anything he can feasibly do about it. After belatedly speaking with his grandfather, he keeps his head down and starts diving into research to find out whether there is anything doable.



So, okay. Adjusting to account for Kreachur's tale in the timing, even if in no other particular, since we are off chasing a wild potential plot bunny here. At some point late in 1979 or early 1980, certainly no later than summer break, Bellatrix shows up, boasting to Reggie of her mission to hide the Locket. She doesn't necessarily come out and say as much. She probably doesn't necessarily go into any kind of detail about the Locket. She certainly doesn't talk about the cave. She doesn't need to. In this iteration Reggie does not need to have ever heard of the cave. Albus learned about the cave somewhere else. Probably got a nudge when reviewing his own memory of that interview with Mrs Cole back in '38.

Bellatrix does, however, wave the Locket under Reggie's nose and point out that it was Salazar Slytherin's own — see his mark?

Bellatrix may even have shown up to ask for ideas on where

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to hide the damned thing. But, whatever the case, she makes it clear — even if not in so many words — that *she* is the Dark Lord's *favorite* and he has entrusted her with his most precious treasure which she is to take and hide in a place of safety. She is being unforgivably indiscreet, but this is *family*. And Reggie is an *insider*.

If Orion is already dead, especially if he is dead of meddling, Bella may even have been ordered to find out whether Walburga knows anything that means she needs to be eliminated as well (Walburga doesn't know anything. Absolutely clueless).

Reggie, who has by now discovered Tom Riddle's background, and has lost his father, and knows that he has been tricked into lifelong enslavement to a halfblood, is already simmering with resentment, determined to strike a blow against what he now regards as a *false* Dark Lord, even if he does get himself killed for it. He has also already figured out that the presumably deathless "Dark Lord" has to have created a Horcrux.

After all, once his grandfather finally told him what kind of a mistake he has made, he has been combing the family library for some way in which he can strike a blow against a deathless Dark Lord, and there just aren't that many ways to achieve deathlessness.

Or to unravel it.

He makes the intuitive leap to the certainty that this "treasure" entrusted to cousin Bella must be the Horcrux. He may even recognize Slytherin's mark and realizing that it really was Slytherin's locket considers it another affront that a halfblood like Riddle should have possession of such a treasure, rather than a fine noble family like, say, the Blacks.

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Walburga invites Bellatrix to tea, or luncheon, or whatever.

While Bella is off washing her hands, (or questioning her aunt), Reggie transfigures something into a duplicate of the Locket, writes his “screw you” letter, inserts it, and, with a switching spell, substitutes his copy for the original.

He manages to hit the unsuspecting Bella with a Confundus Charm at some point during the visit. She doesn’t realize that the locket she now has is not the same one she brought.

Bella leaves and hides the false Horcrux in the sea cave, according to her instructions.

But Reggie at 17 isn’t *quite* smooth enough to exercise the necessary self-control needed to really pull his coup off. He later unwisely asks Bellatrix whether the Locket she was entrusted with is Voldemort’s Horcrux (or he may just have let it slip that her Master is a halfblood) — and realizes as soon as the words are out of his mouth that he has made a fatal blunder.

Bellatrix is sharp enough to know what kind of trouble in the ranks calling their Lord a halfblood is likely to raise. Whatever it was, Reggie realizes that she is not going to keep her mouth shut, and any attempt to ask her to not mention the matter, or to promise his own silence will only make the likelihood that she will speak up worse. Any questions on the subject is going to throw the cat among the pigeons.

As soon as she leaves, he warns his mother that he is on the hit list, gets word to his grandfather about which members of the family have also been drawn into the Dark Lord’s army and bolts. He may make a stab at disarming the Locket, but after being unable to get it open, gives up and leaves it behind.

Reggie’s death date shows up on the tapestry a few days later.



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Because Bellatrix did ask Voldemort whether the Locket is his Horcrux, and/or revealed to her Master that Reggie knows he has one. Or at least that Reggie knows his halfblood background.

In either case, Voldemort immediately orders the boy’s death just in the interests of security. Bella is fortunate not to be eliminated as well. But her loyalty is utterly unquestionable and her degree of hero worship enough to save her. Voldemort decides instead to hedge his bets and tells her that yes, the Locket is his Horcrux, and she must never ever let anyone know.



In canon he has to have done something like that after the probable debacle with the Cup.

Because, when you stop and think about the matter, Bellatrix seems to be awfully certain, at the time of her trial and sentencing, after the Dark Lord’s first defeat, that Lord Voldemort is not dead. Of course it’s Bellatrix, so it is easy to chalk up any wild statements from her as sheer bravado. (I think the Hat must have *really* wanted to put her in Gryffindor, and she flatly refused to go. She and the “new” Ginny are looking more similar by the moment. I confess to a certain degree of amusement when Bellatrix in full cry put Harry in mind of Ginny and her “blazing look.”)

But Albus was present at that trial, and he witnessed that statement. Did it set off any warning bells for him? Or is this another instance of his making no statement unless he can prove it, in triplicate, before witnesses?

Because Horcruxes are not exactly new technology. They certainly aren’t something Tom invented. The information



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about them is out there. It's just not in the library at Hogwarts. Albus may not want other people to know about them, but he can't keep them from finding out about the theory at least. Not once they are out of school.

And (still riding a bucking plot bunny here) if Bellatrix knows about the Locket, then she could be after it too, even if only because she wants to keep Voldemort from finding out how badly she flubbed the hiding of it. More probably, of course, she knows that it is something that must not fall into the hands of his enemies.

Or possibly she believes that if she has one of them, she can get its creator *back*. Nor is she exactly wrong. She could, given a bit of time, have certainly got a *version* of him back.

If nothing else, she is sincere. Indeed, she has always been *completely* sincere. Disliking her is no reason for us to overlook that fact. In fact she is so sincere that I really can believe that Tom may have trusted her with information about one of the Horcruxes rather than to have to execute his most faithful fan-girl for having stumbled over it.

And... it also just makes such perfect literary logic that Sirius Black, for the third time, managed to totally bollix up Albus's plans. The Black family wasn't just the Dark Lord's bane (actio Professor_Mum's theory), if you ask me. It seems to be clear that the Blacks are far more of a liability to their allies than they are to their enemies. Born marplots, every single one of them.

I did agree that it would make sense, and would certainly provide us a nice shortcut to find the Locket in Kreacher's nest. But I was beginning to suspect, and even to hope, that it wouldn't be that easy. The Locket would make the very best

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of wild geese to chase through the last book, stumbling over the Cup in the process, with the Scar (and the Wand?) waiting for us at the finish line. That would make for a more focused storyline I thought. And give us an echo of PS/SS as well. In fact it would give us echoes of all three of the first three books, wherein the final reveal also gives us the answer to questions we never thought to ask.



The death of her favorite son (and her husband?) seems to have been the last straw for Walburga, and for Arcturus Black as well. They bar the doors against Bellatrix — formerly a considerable favorite, who they probably now regard as another misled victim like their Reggie, and probably the rest of that whole branch of the family as well.

So where does that leave Madam Black?

For that matter, where does that leave old Arcturus Black? Housebound, perhaps?

Did Walburga Black spend the last six years of her life, and Arcturus the last 12 years of his effectively prisoners in their own homes; Walburga with no company other than Kreacher? Might this explain something of the conduct of Walburga's portrait?

But Voldemort was gone within a year and a half after Reggie's death. And Bellatrix was in Azkaban before much later. Walburga had no real reason to continue to live in such seclusion.

Or did she?

Perhaps most importantly, we got no suggestion from the conduct of Madam Black's portrait that Sirius Black's *family* had ever bought into the Ministry's official story that Sirius was

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involved with Lord Voldemort or the Death Eaters. Indeed, her objections to him seem all to be on exactly the opposite grounds!

If that's what her shrieking was actually about. Perhaps Walburga spent the rest of her life railing about the filthy halfblood Riddle (who she remembers from school perfectly well. I doubt he endeared himself to her) who had almost single-handedly destroyed her entire family.

Is that why Sirius, despite having been previously disowned, ended up inheriting the house from his grandfather after all? Because Arcturus did *not* believe that Sirius had ever been involved with the Death Eaters? And that even if he was in Azkaban, so long as he lived, the Malfoys — another pack of the Nameless Upstart's followers were not getting their hands on his house, or its contents.

In fact, by the end of 1979 — apart from Arcturus's daughter Lucretia, who is female, and childless — Sirius is about the only surviving younger representative of the Black family that Arcturus can be reasonably confident has *not* gotten involved with Tom Riddle or the Death Eaters.

Well, other than Andromeda Tonks, of course.

Is that why he reinstated Sirius as his heir?

Did he announce that decision after discovering Bellatrix and Narcissa's husbands' involvement with the DEs, over Walburga's objections? Is the portrait's behavior consistent with Walburga having had the law laid down to her by her father-in-law? Did Arcturus change his will at this point to ensure that his cousin Pollux, or his cousin's son Cygnus and his daughters will never get their hands on his house.

Works for me.

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Don't know for sure whether it works for the series. Particularly not in the face of the changing dates on the tapestry.

But then you also have to question Sirius's statement that Kreachur hadn't cleaned anything in 10 years. Walburga had been dead for 10 years, but Arcturus lived until '91. Dying only four years earlier.

Of course Quentin Crisp assured us that after 4 years the dust gets no thicker.

But Lucretia outlived her father by only a single year (if even that), and he may have been living with her. Particularly if she was widowed young. Which is possible. Apart from the Lestranges', hers is the only childless marriage on that tapestry in the past 150 or so years. And we can see the Blacks did not go in for second marriages.

But, in this scenario, if Reggie passed the word to anyone I doubt it was to his mother. And it certainly wasn't to Kreachur, either. Kreachur still idolizes Bellatrix.

But, you'll notice that even amid all the pond scum Kreachur does mutter under his breath, he says nothing particularly favorable about the Dark Lord himself. And while he clearly knows who Harry Potter is, and just as clearly detests him, you just don't get the feeling that having brought the Dark Lord down had anything to do with that.

And, "talking — not listening," seems to have been one of Walburga's specialties.

So did Walburga continue to live as a shut-in after Regulus and Orion's deaths, Voldemort's fall, the DE trials, and Bella-

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trix's sentencing to Azkaban? The condition of Walburga's house certainly makes it sound like it.

Why?

What did Regulus say before he bolted? What did he tell Arcturus?

Did they know that the Locket was a Horcrux?

How could they know that and not do something about it if they opposed Riddle?

Has the Locket already been disarmed?

By Arcturus?

Or, knowing that Riddle created a Horcrux, and that they now had custody of that Horcrux — of which Regulus may have informed him — and not being able to get the Locket open to disarm it, and not daring to simply destroy it, did Arcturus stick it in the display case in the parlor and just not tell anyone. Not even Walburga?

After Sirius's arrest and sentencing to Azkaban, Arcturus seems to have given up. He did not ever return to live at #12. Although the house was still his. He left Walburga in possession of it, and after her death it was occupied only by Kreacher.

At the end of his life, or at some point in those final six years while he still had access to the house, where he no longer cared to live, might he have finally thrown in the towel and whispered the truth to Phineas's portrait?

Did Albus know that the Locket was supposed to be at #12?

Was the locket we saw there even the *right* Locket?

Well, we won't know until we find it, will we?

Oh I could see that the Locket was going to lead us a merry dance in Book 7.



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But I'd still check the Black family's Gringotts vault if I were Harry.



I'm a bit sorry that that theory is now out of bounds. It plays extremely well with what we had to go by at the end of HBP.



Which brings us to the question of why Albus dragged us off to the sea cave in the first place. He may even have known that the Horcrux was no longer at #12. Why otherwise should he make such a point of retrieving R.A.B.'s "Screw you" note from the cave in order to set Harry back on the trail?

Well, downstream of DHs, what I suspect may have happened was yet another "failure to communicate." Albus, as usual, did not *tell* anyone that the Locket was *important*, and in return, Albus was not immediately told when Sirius Black threw the Locket out. Albus thought that it was safe in the Black's parlor. He still hadn't really grasped the full scope of Sirius Black's positive genius for bollixing up other people's carefully-laid plans. Even though Albus had already been bitten by it before. *Twice*, in fact.

Of course Albus was told, *eventually*, Far too late to do anything but set up a new hunt for the accursed thing. It is probable that he only discovered the loss of the Locket when the Order cleared out of Grimmauld Place after Sirius's death.

I think he might have intended to collect and destroy both the Locket and the Ring at the beginning of Year 6 when he finally launched Operation Horcrux, and only discovered its



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loss then. Some of his absences from the School over the year were probably spent following leads on it. As well as to the cave.

In fact, if he knew about the Locket at #12, the disappearance of it is probably *why* he put such an effort into tracing the leads that ended up in the cave at all. He had to backtrack to where the Locket was supposed to have been originally. Not on his own account, of course, but on Harry's.

In short, he thought he needed to start Harry off at the head of the trail, (although why he couldn't have simply *told* the boy, I don't know) since he trusted that once Harry made the necessary connection of R.A.B. = Regulus Black, he would be able to follow up on it. But then that would have been no good unless they managed to retrieve whatever message Reggie might have left with the decoy. He was probably reasonably confident that Reggie *had* left a message of some sort.

Although why he didn't just tell Harry that Kreachur may have known something, and that as his Master he should order Kreachur to just tell him what it was, I also don't know. Particularly if Albus is supposed to have picked up the clue of the cave and the inferi from legilimency images he got from Kreachur.

Of course, by then, Albus was on the point of staging his own exit; his health and his own time to deal with the issue had run out, forcing him to pass the job on to Harry. And, he may very well not have been thinking clearly due to interference from the curse on his hand gradually overtaking his whole system. In the outside chance that he was magically constrained from telling Harry about Regulus Black, he had to introduce Reggie's name and role into the hunt by some other means. If this was the case, anyone who might be able to reveal Reggie's part in

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the matter was no longer accessible to Harry.

But the only scenario in which Regulus Black would be required to make a personal appearance over the course of book 7 was if the sea cave Horcrux was not the Locket. In that case we really did need his story, because there didn't seem to be anyone else around to tell it. And that possibility was beginning to look less and less likely.

Of course there was also the chance that Albus was giving Harry the opportunity to spread the word of where the bloody army of Inferi was stashed to someone in authority, so they could go in there and clear it out before Voldemort brought them back online, too.

But, given that it was dependent upon Harry, that possibility seems a bit too sensible to hope for.



Which sends us back to the cave again:

Hopefully for the last time.

The indications are very clear that Dumbledore knew *something* of what to expect in that cave, but he did not appear to have all the details, and he seemed to need to "feel his way."

Actually, that "feeling his way" impression now looks to me as if he had hedged his bets before leaving the castle that evening with a 2–3 hour dose of Felix Felicis, and was waiting to see all the possibilities spread out before him before he made each statement or took each action. Compare this with the more subjective account of Harry's actions while under the influence of Felix a few chapters earlier and decide for yourself.

The obvious question at the end of HBP was, if Reggie's

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death was faked by Albus and Co., and the sea cave Horcrux was the Locket, and it has not already been destroyed, then why Dumbledore did not immediately try to recover the real Horcrux and destroy it when he first heard of it. Or at any point after Voldemort's first disappearance.

Well, post DHs, now we know. Evidently Albus hadn't a clue as to Reggie's doings.

Even if he had, up until 1991, Reggie's grandfather was still alive, and I doubt that Albus was a favorite of his.

And he was hardly going to break into the man's house to get it, even if Arcturus wasn't living there. And, after Arcturus Black's death, Albus still had no access to that house until Sirius broke out of Azkaban and could be convinced to go into hiding there. But we have no clear idea why Albus didn't take custody of it then. If he knew about it.

Which pretty strongly implies that he didn't. Or didn't know that Reggie had stolen it anyway. Youngsters (other than Tom Riddle) have managed to pull the wool over the Headmaster's eyes before this. And not all that infrequently, either.

But the only way he could have avoided recognizing it in the display case in the parlor is if he hadn't reviewed his memories of having seen it in Madam Smith's collection recently enough to recall what it looked like. And not bothering to even give the Black collection of Dark artifacts a decent once-over. Which is just sheer bloody carelessness, and all a part of the willful incompetence which appears to be an Albus Dumbledore specialty. He had a good six months to figure it out before Sirius decided to clean house and tossed it.

But then, if the "one with the power" to vanquish the Dark

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Lord was the Potters' (or the Longbottoms') child, Albus may have been hesitant to do anything to rock the boat until the kid was old enough to take a hand in the matter. Destroying his Horcruxes is likely to make Tom even more stropy than usual if he finds it out. Besides, Albus certainly didn't want to give Tom any reason to make even *more* of them as replacements.

If he even could. There must be a practical limit to how many Horcruxes any one person can make from a single soul.

So, not doing anything to alarm Tom Riddle makes a *degree* of sense. But not enough to justify Albus's *total* inaction.

We could only hope that Tom hadn't replaced the Diary. We were told that Tom knew that he'd lost that one. Harry gave it back to Lucius, disarmed, and Tom pried the story out of Lucius.

But it still might have been a good idea to have taken a good look into those display cases and confiscate the Locket as soon as Sirius opened the house to serve as Headquarters. The bloody thing was on display, for heaven's sake. I ask you!

Which, since Albus did nothing of the sort, might be an indication that the old man really was slipping. And in *that* year he *wasn't* juggling any kind of wasting curse to explain it.

Or, possibly that he didn't spend enough time in the house himself to discover it. Which sounds just plain careless if he knew anything about the "adventure" of the sea cave, which pretty well establishes that he didn't. Or at least he didn't *then*. He clearly seems to by the time he took Harry there. (Although by then it was about a year too late.)

Maybe he read about that cave in Beedle. I would have bet it was in there somewhere. (The original concept of Beedle was supposed to have been close to 30 stories — until Rowling realized

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that she would have to write it out by hand six times and bailed.)

But the fact that even after Albus knew that Voldemort must have made multiple Horcruxes, and until he viewed Slughorn's memory he could not have known for certain how many multiple Horcruxes there probably were — although I'd say he had strong suspicions before that — he left them all in place until he was ready to address Operation Horcrux. And he wasn't prepared to do that until Harry was of an age to take part in it, and the Ministry was admitting they had a Dark Lord problem on their hands.

Or circumstances forced his hand. Which I think the events of the opening of the summer of '96 did.

Once again we get an up close and personal view of Albus Dumbledore's true besetting weaknesses. And they have nothing to do with seeing the best in others. He was far, far too reluctant to Take Action in any manner which might solve a problem before it got completely out of hand.

I'll ask you all again: are we *really* sure that Dumbledore was an ex-Gryff? His failures were the absolutely classic Ravenclaw failures of inaction, excessive detachment, the tendency to hang back and just observe; of being just so *confident* in one's superior *understanding* of the significance of all this minutia one is collecting — and of expecting any problem to solve itself without his intervention. Anything less like the besetting Gryffindor failing of leaping in, half-cocked, before you have the whole story would be difficult to imagine.

All of which is compounded by his fetish for catching wrongdoers in the act, before witnesses.

From his personal history it is easy enough to see where

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that last weakness comes from. It must make things go much smoother to be able to do so when a matter comes before the Wizengamot. Considering the difficulties people run into when trying to pry a verdict out of a jury of 12, can you imagine the nightmare it must be with a body of 50? But still, there is a time and a place for that sort of thing.

The best time to have gone out hunting Horcruxes was while Voldemort was out of commission. And Albus had to know that there was at least one of them from the time of Tom's first defeat. He claims that he knew from the beginning that Voldemort wasn't dead. The list of things that would have kept Voldemort from dying when his own curse rebounded is even shorter than the list of what monsters are stone-turners. Albus has to have known that there was at least one Horcrux in the equation, even if he knew nothing about Reggie's adventure.

Could he have believed that the Harrycrux was the only one?

If he did, then he will have concluded that the Prophecy had delivered him a cure that was worse than the disease. Maybe that's why he now is claiming that all Prophecies are bunk. Maybe he didn't think that way before.

But, no. That Albus was able to go straight to the Gaunt ruin and dig out the Ring, almost as soon as the Ministry admitted that Voldemort was back, and the term broke up, suggests that even without knowing for certain that there were supposed to be six of the damned things, he knew, or had strong suspicions, about that one. And that the Harrycrux was in the equation at all, was proof that there were multiple ones.

Why he didn't dig the Ring out at once when he formed those suspicions and take it to the room of the Veil and pitch it

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through I don't know (well, I do *now*). It stands to reason that's how you get rid of a Horcrux safely. Let it anchor Tom Riddle's soul on the other side of it.

Hypothetically, if they could have taken them all out while Voldemort was still disembodied, they might even have pulled the conscious part of his soul through the Veil after them. And then we wouldn't have this problem.

Although it might have been a puzzle getting the Cup out of the Lestrangle's vault.

And except, of course, for the little inconvenience that the last of the set happened to be Harry.



C.S.I.: Godric's Hollow

This essay replaces an older, and rather well-known essay once entitled 'The Changeling Hypothesis.'

I had been rather pleased with that one, since in it I had managed to get about as close to figuring out what was going on in the story of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord as anyone in fandom is likely to ever get.

Unfortunately, once the concept of Horcruxes had been officially introduced to canon, it raised the question of; just how *does* one create a Horcrux? And, this issue was major enough for it to have hijacked the entire essay for upwards of a decade.

I have repurposed most of those explorations into the essay entitled 'Broken Promise: An introduction to Horcruxes'. But the subject is still sufficiently relevant to this particular essay, to make it impossible not to re-examine at least some of it in the course of the relevant exploration.



By this point in time, it is obvious that my original extrapolations of whether, and how, Harry Potter might have been "changed" by the events of Halloween 1981 are no longer the most convoluted element related to that event. Not by a long shot.

No, the most intractable element of that event is attempting to figure out *what happened*, and what precisely went *wrong* with it?

And what, for that matter, could *Lily* have possibly had to do with it?



Nobody has ever given us a satisfactory explanation for that. So.

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Here is yet another exploration of the various possibilities regarding what actually might have taken place in that confrontation.

First, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

- 1 Why did the curse rebound? For that matter just what curse was it?
- 2 What actions had Voldemort taken in his attempt to make himself immortal? He did manage to achieve deathlessness. Is it possible that his previous actions might have some impact on the events of this *particular* attempt to create a Horcrux? It wasn't his first attempt, after all. Indeed, *actio* Albus Dumbledore, it was designed to be his grand finale.
- 3 What is the nature of the connection between Voldemort and Harry? Are any of the other Horcruxes so connected to their creator?
- 4 *Can* we blindly rely on Dumbledore's summation of the matter? Is he telling us (and Harry) everything he knows? Or everything he suspects? Is he telling the *truth* of what he knows/suspects?

As to the first of these questions, we still don't have anything beyond the most shallow of answers, and most of those are extrapolations from fanon, not canon. But I was pretty sure that I may have finally figured it out. Of course I'd thought that before, too. The current iteration is more solid than my earlier ones, at least. But it is still a product of speculation.

Plus, I also had come to suspect that we had been following a false trail since GoF.



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Q: When Crouch/Moody told us that there was only one person known to have survived the Avada Kadavra Curse, and that "he is sitting in this classroom," why did we believe him?

A: We believed him because he was a teacher. And he gave us what appeared to be a viable answer to the standing question of what had taken place the night that Voldemort went to murder Harry Potter, and didn't succeed.

But is that any reason to go on believing him *now*?

It was also implied that Crouch Jr was still a raw recruit in 1981, he is said to have been no more than 18–19 years old at the time of Voldemort's first defeat (or was he?). In any case, I very much doubt that he ever knew anything about Voldemort's Horcruxes. He certainly wasn't at Godric's Hollow. What the hell does *he* know about what curse Voldemort threw at Harry Potter? He wasn't there to see it.

The obvious syllogism goes; AK is the "killing curse." Voldemort tried to kill Harry Potter. Therefore, Voldemort tried to kill Harry Potter with an AK.

Well. No. Not *necessarily*. Not even when Rowling goes out of her way to try to convince us of such. We've seen way too many examples of the fact that Rowling doesn't bother to "think" about the kinds of things she plunks into her story to make that kind of an assumption. She also lies as easily as Albus Dumbledore. We are not ever going to get a well thought-out extrapolation of what happened at Godric's Hollow from Rowling. Anything she gives us is almost guaranteed to be as full of holes as Swiss cheese. And she doesn't like to be pinned down or to be expected to maintain consistency with anything she's already told us, either. We've got the Flints to prove it. All in all,



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we'll be much better off rolling our own.

Now, many a year after the fact, I am *still* unwilling to concede that it might have been an AK that Voldemort attempted to throw at Harry Potter. The very fact that the curse rebounded in itself argues strongly against it. Under anything like a normal circumstance, the AK *does not rebound*.

But other curses might. And other curses can also kill.

So I am not just not blindly accepting that the curse that Tom Riddle tried to kill little Harry Potter with was the Avada Kadavra curse. No, not even when DHs tried to show him doing it. I flatly do not *believe* DHs. I'll only accept something handed up to me in DHs if it makes sense of something *else* we've been handed to juggle. And there are remarkably few things in DHs that will do that. And that fake "flashback" isn't one of them.



For the record; that "flashback" to Halloween 1981 in DHs was such a botch of contradictions to just about everything that had ever been said, or hinted, about the attack in Godric's Hollow over the course of the series to date, that it is easier to conclude that what we were actually being given was a trip inside of Tom's head, fantasizing about how things **ought** to have gone in 1981. Not necessarily what had actually happened. Telling himself, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, what he *should* have done. But probably didn't.

I mean, just for starters, *I* certainly didn't see anything that that constituted an offer to save herself in those demands to "get out of the way." Leading me to suspect that what we are seeing is him now telling himself that he should have simply cut the

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little fool down where she stood, and *then* moved on to the child.

Which suggests that perhaps in 1981, he hadn't.

Nor, you will notice, over the course of that entire sequence, is there *any* suggestion of *any* intent to create a Horcrux from murdering that child. Given that by this point every reader *knows* about the Horcruxes, there is no advantage to be gained by the narrator's concealing this intention. Nor of pretending that bits of wicked people's souls somehow randomly get stuck into other people's children by accident, either.

Which suggests to me that by 1997-'98 Tom has concluded that trying to create a Horcrux from that particular murder was a mistake. But that doesn't mean that in 1981 he didn't attempt it.



Particularly if Dumbledore *was* correct in his stated belief that Voldemort's *intention* was to create a Horcrux from Harry Potter's murder (Rowling appears to have somehow completely forgotten all about *that* claim by the time she sat down to write DHs. There is not the slightest suggestion of any attempt to create a Horcrux in that flashback, which is a large part of what convinces me that the "flashback" is no such thing). In the absence of any additional confirmation we are forced to consider that Albus may have been deliberately lying to Harry, when he told him as much. Probably in order to give him a hint that Tom **had** created a Horcrux at Godric's Hollow. Or perhaps just to butter the kid up and make him feel "special."

But the Avada Kadavra curse does *not* in itself create a Horcrux, or Horcruxes would be a lot thicker on the ground than

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they are, and just about every third DE would have at least one.

They would certainly be a lot wider *known about* than they are. And for all that Avada Kadavra is referred to as the “killing curse,” like I say, it is hardly the *only* curse that kills. Wizards are perfectly aware of this, although common usage tends to conflate the issue.

AK is only the killing curse which is reputed to be “unblockable.”

A 15-month-old infant is not going to be doing a lot of curse blocking.

Perhaps the requisite sacrificial victim of a Horcrux-creating murder isn't going to be in a position capable of doing any kind of curse blocking *either*.



Rowling, obviously never considered the details of the process necessary for creating a Horcrux important enough to work it out all the way through to a logical conclusion. (Or, for that matter, how to account for how Albus supposedly knows *exactly* what happened at Godric's Hollow despite the fact that there were no surviving witnesses apart from Harry who Rowling is determined to insist didn't see what was going on.) But let's explore this particular conundrum a bit further.

A classic AK is widely agreed to be unique in that it is unblockable. Lily shouldn't have been able to have stopped one of those. She certainly ought not to have had any control over an AK which was cast by somebody else after she was dead. An AK ought to have simply killed her, and killing her should have had no effect upon any subsequent spells cast by her murderer. James had certainly attempted to get in the way of Voldemort



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when he followed Lily and Harry up the stairs. So why didn't the curse rebound when he killed Lily?

There is no plausible reason why killing Lily first should have made a subsequent AK rebound on its caster.

In complete defiance of Rowling's statements, and *particularly* in defiance of the so-called flashback at Godric's Hollow (which is totally crackfic), I *still* don't believe that what Tom threw at Harry would be a standard AK. I don't think that what Tom threw at Harry was *any* kind of an AK at all. Even if it is Rowling who seems to think it was. (Maybe she just didn't want to have to stop and hand us yet another infodump in the middle of an action sequence.)

Even dismissing most of the (totally unconvincing) information that was pasted on in DHs, we still are stuck with a number of anomalies to juggle regarding the event.

One major anomaly we have to juggle is the issue that when *whatever* the spell was that rebounded, Tom's body appears to have been completely destroyed by it. There was no body left at the scene of the attempted murder. The Dark Lord did not merely die, he *disappeared*.

And the wall blew out. AK might damage inanimate objects when it hits them by mistake, but it doesn't typically cause explosions.

And, finally, it should also be pointed out that there was NO record in the Priori Incantatum “log” from Tom's wand in GoF of *any* curse that failed. Or, indeed, any spell *whatsoever* being cast during the period that would account for Harry's injury or Voldemort's disappearance. The log skipped directly from Bertha Jorkins's murder, to Lily's.



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With *nothing* in between.



If the spell had been a standard AK — which is presumably unblockable — it ought not to have bounced at all. If it hit the wrong person, it should have simply killed the wrong person. End of story.

If the spell had merely bounced, it ought to have still worked as designed when it *did* hit a living target, even if it ended up hitting the wrong person. Harry and Draco's ricocheting spells, in GoF, were both perfectly functional after they collided and hit persons they were not aimed at. But whatever Voldemort threw at Harry rebounded and, not merely *killing* the caster's body, completely *destroyed* it. Allegedly.

Clearly whatever Lily did totally bollixed whatever Tom was trying to do.

With mostly unforeseen results.

Which Albus Dumbledore nevertheless gives every *appearance* of having been able to piece together, after the fact, despite the lack of any eyewitness account. I don't care how powerful a wizard he is, he ought not to have been able to do that. Not if this is something that had *never happened before* (as Rowling keeps trying to claim).

Not unless there was something about the scene of the crime itself which made it plain what had happened. So, can we extrapolate a series of actions that would produce a physical result that Albus would have been able to use to piece together what had taken place?

Keeping in mind that Albus at least *did* have access to those

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books which referenced the creation of Horcruxes, using the traditional method. And, by the time he spoke of the matter to Harry, plenty of time to research them. And to consider details.

He is very insistent that Harry lived because his mother died to save him from as early as Book 1. I don't think he is shaving the truth particularly closely when he tells us so. And there is no really satisfactory way of placing an eyewitness at the scene who could have reported the event. So how does he know?

What precisely did Lily *do*?



Which is probably not the right question to be asking. A more relevant question is; what, precisely, was *Tom* trying to do?

I think we really ought to be asking whether we have enough information to postulate just how any Horcrux-creation spell works yet. Because just about any attempt to extrapolate what happened is going to depend on that. And that seems to be something that it would be better to address in a different essay altogether. That exploration totally hijacks this one.

For that more in-depth exploration on the creation of Horcruxes, I'll direct you attention to the essay entitled; 'Broken Promise: An Introduction to Horcruxes'.

But we do need to have at least a basic idea in order to continue further here.

And what we have to extrapolate *here* is some plausible way in which Lily could have managed to derail it.



This is hardly my first attempt to try to extrapolate what

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the spell that Voldemort threw at Harry was and how it was *supposed* to work, and, most importantly, what exactly went wrong with it. I've posted at least two earlier iterations of attempts at a solution to the problem over the past 20 years. So, consider this an exercise in trying to open door #3.

To repeat: under normal conditions, the Avada Kadavra curse does not automatically create a Horcrux

Horace Slughorn — who admittedly is probably not the most knowledgeable of sources on the subject — claims that there is “a spell” needed to create a Horcrux. He claims (and for what it's worth, I believe him) not to know this spell.

sigh

C'mon, I'm sure that even Slughorn knows the AK. However reluctant he might be to use it.

So, for starters, I am going to postulate that the Horcrux-creating spell is probably not unblockable.

In the event, the spell apparently *was* blocked. So, Voldemort did not attempt to murder Harry Potter by means of the Avada Kadavra curse. He probably attempted to kill Harry Potter by means of that unnamed Horcrux-creation curse that Slughorn was referring to.

Lily's sacrificial death blocked *that* one.

And the Diary Revenant came out and admitted as much, now that we have some context to understand what it may have actually been telling us.

“So. Your mother died to save you. Yes, that's a powerful counter-charm. I can see now...”

Excuse me; but haven't we all been told, loud and clear, and repeatedly, that Avada Kadavra *has no known counter-charm*?

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I think even 16-year-old Riddle knew perfectly well that the same lack of a counter-charm did not apply to the *documented* Horcrux-creation spell. (Especially since by all indications he had already created his own first one by that time.) Let alone the probability that the Diary Revenant's actual soul source was not the 16-year-old Riddle whose memories had given it form, but the 54-year-old Riddle of 1981.

There might have been any number of possible ways to have blocked that spell. Lily's willing sacrifice stopped it cold.

One big question now is whether Lily knew that this is what would happen.

Rowling is insistent that she didn't.



There are very few means by which to attain deathlessness, and Voldemort was not famed for creating a Philosopher's Stone.

But Horcruxes are a *banned* subject at Hogwarts. James Potter had been brought up to abhor the Dark Arts. Sirius Black no longer had access to his own family's extensive Dark Arts library after the age of 16, and we know nothing of Lupin (a halfblood) or Pettigrew's family backgrounds. There is no obvious source of information on Horcruxes to be found here.

For that matter, Lily wouldn't even go out with James until 7th year, and being Muggle-born, had no obvious avenues of inquiry regarding Horcruxes, either.

But the information is out there if you know where to look for it. If Regulus Black, at the age of 17 could have figured out that Voldemort had a Horcrux, it stands to reason that somebody else with access to a private library without the limita-

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tions that Dumbledore has imposed upon the one at Hogwarts could find it out as well. Dumbledore's banning of the subject is presumably a comparatively recent phenomenon.

And that ban only applies to Hogwarts.

It stands to reason that the Blacks are not the only family with Dark Arts volumes in their private library. Indeed, I suspect that you could find a nice collection of such at Spinner's End. I very much doubt that Severus Snape put that whole library together himself, although he has certainly added to it. I think he inherited the majority of it from his mother and/or his Prince grandparents. This is a *possible* source of at least some basic information. But not an essential one. And certainly not the only one.



My original reading was that Lily — who the reader had been consistently led to underestimate throughout the series — in an act of desperation masked in surface hysteria had maneuvered Voldemort into tacitly agreeing to a binding magical contract of “my life for Harry’s.” And that by killing her, rather than simply stunning her, he sealed his own fate, believing himself to be beyond the reach of consequences. When he turned his wand on Harry the “breach of contract” clause nailed him. If he had not already rendered himself deathless, that would have been the end of the story.

It now seems to me, however, that even *that* explanation is more complex than really required. As of January/February, 2007 (i.e., before the release of DHs), the dominoes had been falling like rain.

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As things have turned out, I think that it is abundantly clear that it is what Tom did *himself* that established the connection between himself and Harry. What Lily did to cause the curse to misfire prevented the connection from being *broken*.



Which brings me to yet another ultimately fruitless exploration.

As with so many other situations, Rowling deliberately set this one up — and then apparently forgot about it altogether, for she certainly did nothing with it.

According to Albus Dumbledore's reading of the circumstances, Voldemort allegedly intended to create his sixth and final Horcrux from the death of Harry Potter.

Dumbledore goes on to imply that the rebounding curse prevented this, and that if he has created a sixth Horcrux, it was done after his return to the material plane. Dumbledore also admits that he makes mistakes, and that when he does they are likely to be huge ones.

In common with most of fandom, I was of the opinion that Dumbledore had either made a mistake in this case, or he has deliberately deflected inquiry from its proper object for reasons which were not immediately obvious. Along with rather a lot of the readers, I was sure that the sixth Horcrux was not Nagini. The sixth Horcrux — such as it is — was Harry Potter.

In this supposition we were led to believe that we were wrong (actually we weren't), and I was duly disgusted to learn that Nagini turned out to be a Horcrux after all.

However, the fact that Voldemort *had* created another Horcrux — although *not* from the death of Frank Bryce, but

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(*ex-cathedra*) from that of Bertha Jorkins, once he returned to a vestigial physical form concealed *from Tom* the discovery that he had *also* created one from the infant Harry Potter when his curse misfired at Godric's Hollow.

We saw what Riddle looked like in his interview with Madam Hepzibah Smith after he had already created his first Horcrux.

We saw what he looked like upon his return to the wizarding world 10 years and (presumably) three additional Horcruxes later.

Voldemort was familiar with each incremental step of the process between those two points. And when he ran his hands over his newly-formed face after rising from the cauldron, he would have expected to discover the changes wrought by creating his most recent Horcrux. Which is to say, Nagini. The changes between the "molten wax" face that he wore upon his return from his first exile, and the "mask-like" face that he has worn since his second return are extreme enough to detect by touch (like, say, no longer having a *nose*), running those spidery hands over his face, as Harry watched him do.

Even though, as I suspect, there may have been a brief incremental stage (or the *beginnings* of a brief incremental stage, we have no way of knowing how long such a physical change takes to establish itself) between the wax image and the mask that came out of the cauldron which appeared in the year before his first defeat (since I am now inclined to believe that the Diary was actually the 5th Horcrux, created around 1980–81).



However, working our way back (again) to Godric's Hollow: Horace Slughorn claimed that "a spell" existed for the pur-

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pose of creating a Horcrux when Riddle asked his question in the academic year 1942–'43, but that *he* did not know that spell, and he insisted that the subject had already been banned. I think we can probably take Slughorn at his word on this much. Tom Riddle did not learn how to create a Horcrux from Horace Slughorn. At most, he only got confirmation on what a Horcrux was.

sigh This is completely without regard to the direct contradiction to Slughorn's information that Rowling inserted into DHs when she decided that she had painted herself into a corner again. (And it has also now become abundantly clear that we cannot trust *any* statement of Rowling's that was ever made in *any* interview, since she lacks the integrity to even stand by what she has already published in the novels. And claiming that she doesn't reread her own work after it's published is *not* an acceptable excuse.)

But we also know that Riddle, by all accounts, was once supposedly brilliant. The very fact that he created that Diary, not just from the manner in which he had designed its housing; incorporating the function of a calendar, *and* a Pensieve (both of which were probably originally created for some other purpose than what we ultimately saw them used for), and then retrofitting an interactive user interface by which the fragment later housed in the Horcrux might be able to influence and take possession of the holder, steal their life and escape from the book (one life spent to put it in, another spent to take it out), we can conclude that he was not in the least averse to messing about with extremely dangerous, highly experimental magic.

But first, he had to find out how to split his soul, and eject a fragment, enabling him to do it.

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Although when he did discover the documented method, he evidently postulated that the traditional spell might not even be necessary — or not to a wizard like *himself*, at least! And then set about to prove it. And did. Tom Riddle never needed that traditionally documented Horcrux-enabling spell.

Well, we are not without possibilities there. Albus Dumbledore was not able to ban information related to the creation of Horcruxes outside of Hogwarts. And it has been pointed out to me that Riddle may not in fact have spent all of his summers in that orphanage. Which opens up a whole other line of inquiry.

But I do agree with the fan who pointed out that Tom may have learned more from Slughorn, than just what a Horcrux was; this fan also implied that Slughorn may have inadvertently given Riddle exactly the information he required when he informed Tom that the subject had been *banned* at Hogwarts.

Banned books are certainly to be numbered among the contents of the Room of Hidden Things. And it is no stretch whatsoever to suspect that by his 5th year Tom Riddle was probably already well acquainted with the Room of Hidden Things.

In fact, that he was familiar with that room was even confirmed in canon. He hid a Horcrux there, after all.



Riddle, who since the date of his interview with Madam Smith apparently has committed a great many murders — enough to stock a good-sized underground lake with Inferi, anyway; to the point that if any mere murder would split one's soul, Tom's lack of any capacity for remorse, would ensure that his soul would probably be no more than a bundle of shreds and tatters — is



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nevertheless still stated by Albus Dumbledore to have reserved the creation of his Horcruxes for “significant” deaths.

I suspect that this may be a slight misstatement on Dumbledore's part. Possibly a quite deliberate one. As a “ritual suicide” — which I now believe any murder used to create a Horcrux to be — *any* death that results in the creation of a Horcrux is by definition a “significant” death. Regardless of how insignificant the apparent victim.

Riddle certainly does appear to have been holding back on the creation the last of his projected set of six Horcruxes, for many years, reserving it for a publicly recognizable significant murder. But there is no reason to suppose that the five deaths that created the others were any more “significant” than that the Diary was an object of historical significance and grandeur.

We do not know the identities of the deaths (significant or otherwise) from which Riddle created Horcruxes from the Diary, the Locket, and the Diadem. Rowling's statements on the subject are contradictory and difficult to reconcile with the facts as they are depicted inside canon. Although I am inclined to believe her when she says that Madam Smith's death created the Cup. But, again, this was an interview statement. She tends to change those each time she is asked anything like the same question. And at this point it looks very much as though we never will know for certain whose deaths he used for this purpose, any more than we will be told the identity of the people who are now sleeping the long sleep in Lake Inferi. But it is implied that by the time he had returned to the wizarding world after his first Albanian exile he had already created at least four of his intended set of 6 Horcruxes.



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We will never know the name of the traditional curse which enables one to split off a piece of one's soul and makes the creation of a Horcrux possible, but, from Slughorn, we know that such a spell certainly exists. Otherwise Slughorn would not have specified that there was a specific spell. He'd have just said it was necessary to murder someone and left it at that, assuming that the spell would of course have been AK. I now suspect the spell that had poor Sluggy hyperventilating was in fact, a *possession* spell.

Something for which Tom Riddle had no need at all. Riddle never needed a spell for *that*.

According to my current extrapolation; to create a Horcrux, one must first *possess* one's Victim and then murder the Victim while one retains possession of them, in a form of ritual suicide, which will split the portion of one's soul that is possessing the Victim off from the rest of its source. The Victim's death severs the connection between its caster and the fragment which is possessing the Victim, and then ejects the soul fragment which had possessed the Victim from the Victim's body, by killing the Victim's body.

Nasty.

The fragment — whose source is still alive, and in no danger of being drawn to the Veil — will attempt to return to that still-living source. Who prevents this return by entrapping it in a new housing, thereby creating a Horcrux.

It is possible, but not essential, that the curse also slows down the soul fragment, or makes it visible to the caster, so it may be more easily snared in a waiting artifact, as a butterfly with a



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net. The artifact evidently does not suck the soul fragment into itself on its own, or you would expect Tom's "Master" fragment to have been entrapped by whatever artifact he brought with him when he went to create his final Horcrux from Harry's murder (assuming the artifact survived the implosion).

Which would have served him right.

Yes, I know Rowling did not mention such an artifact in her "flashback" of what she now wants us to believe took place, but I am not convinced one did not exist. Not if Albus was correct that it was Tom's *intention* to create a Horcrux from Harry's murder. And given the very existence of the Harrycrux, that supposition seems entirely too plausible to just arbitrarily dispense with.

So. Creating a Horcrux is designed to render you immune from death. Creating a Horcrux requires a form of ritual suicide. The Victim serves as an intermediary proxy.

I further postulate — and at this point I admit that I am extrapolating beyond the overtly stated data at our disposal — that the traditional, documented curse, probably does include an additional component for the actual killing of the victim of its possession. Otherwise, a Horcrux would not be created. But Tom Riddle had never needed a spell in order to establish possession of others, and given that his first two Horcruxes appear to have been created by killing their victims without the aid of any spell at all, we have no reason to conclude that Tom had ever used that component of the documented Horcrux-creating spell sequence. I further postulate that the murder component is a *grounded* spell which *requires* that both caster and Victim share the *same* soul. If they don't, I suspect all hell breaks loose.

And, on Halloween of 1981, did.



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It does appear to be at least a viable hypothesis that only wizards who are able to take possession of others would be the ones who are easily capable of creating Horcruxes. Any other sort of witch or wizard *needs* that Horcrux-creation spell to establish the requisite possession of the Victim.

And the spell was probably devised by a wizard or witch who did *not* have Tom's advantage of being able to natively take possession of other creatures. So the spell is primarily intended to establish the required possession. The murder which actually kills the victim, is sent through that connection.

Is the ability to possess others really common, or is it a specialty of wizards of "a certain caliber"? At this point we have no information on that issue. Over the course of the first two books in the series we certainly had our noses rubbed in the fact that Tom Riddle was capable of possessing others against their will. But no other person in the entire series, to the best of my recollection, has *ever* been stated as having "taken possession" of any other beast or being. In DHs we were told that *Horcruxes* tend to do that. And presumably other forms of cursed artifacts are also capable of it. But we never met another witch or wizard who could.

Although it seems fairly clear that the principle of possession is widely enough known for most wizards to at least be familiar with the *concept* of it, for it is spoken of easily enough. But it isn't the first thing one thinks of when faced with a problem.

I think Tom discovered that he could possess other creatures before he got his Hogwarts letter. Billy Stubbs's rabbit hanging



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itself from the rafters now sounds highly suspicious. He probably got it up there and then made it jump, once the rope was around its neck. He broke contact immediately that time, and didn't actually experience its death. And since he did break contact, and the victim wasn't sentient, his soul didn't split off a fragment. It may have taken some damage. Not that he cared.

But the two children he took to that cave may have been less successful "practice pieces" or perhaps he chickened out at the last moment. (Was he able to possess *both* of them at once? Maybe he overreached himself and lost control of them.)

He knew that being a Parselmouth was uncommon by the time he reached Hogwarts. But if possession is rare to begin with, I think he figured out that his facility for that was even rarer. And, indeed, if the spell that Slughorn refers to is in fact a *possession* spell. Tom never needed it at all, and may have been "rolling his own" the whole time. But I would not go so far as to depend upon that. If it works as I extrapolate it working, he almost certainly attempted to use it at Godric's Hollow.

If, perhaps, Tom had *already* found the banned books in the Room of Hidden Things, and knew he could do this, perhaps he wanted to know what *else* he could do with it. Ergo; he took the risk of raising the question to Slughorn, even if it cost him Slughorn's regard. It seems to not be out of reason to suppose that Slughorn's fondness for Riddle might have cooled off abruptly after their discussion on that particular subject.

But he just as certainly did not use the traditional method based upon the documented possession spell to create a Horcrux from the death of Myrtle Warren. There was no detectable "spell" used in that murder whatsoever. Nor was there



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any spell used in the death of Madam Hepzibah Smith. By this point, I have come to the conclusion that Tom may very well have amused himself by experimentally killing *each* of the victims of his first five Horcruxes by a *different* method.

And all of them had worked.



We've also known since Book 1 that Voldemort tried to kill Harry and that his spell evidently rebounded, with the result that he, himself, disappeared.

We had been assuming, ever since GoF that Voldemort attempted to kill Harry with the AK on Barty Crouch Jr's say-so, despite the fact that when that event took place Crouch allegedly wasn't above 18–19 years old, a raw recruit, and wasn't actually present at Godric's Hollow to know what spell Voldemort used. I think that it is time to dismiss whatever Barty Crouch Jr has to say on the subject. It's not impossible, but it is a false lead. A red herring.

I rather think that for what he fully *intended* to be his final Horcrux of his extrapolated set of six, Tom decided to make the grand gesture of using the *traditional* spell.

Which he had never actually cast before.

And it isn't out of the question that he may have destabilized it from the get-go *himself* by *not* using the spell to also establish the required possession.

And Albus's appearance of going along with Crouch's statement in HBP was probably for some reason to which we had not been introduced yet. In DHs it was finally unveiled that yes, Albus was very *deliberately* not telling anyone his suspicion that

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Harry *might* not need to die in order to destroy that particular Horcrux, after all.

Besides, AK typically leaves a body behind. An unmarked body. We have also watched it do varying levels of physical damage to inanimate objects.

So right there we've been thrown a curve regarding our speculations. It throws them right into limbo. For we do have some level of confidence that all five of the known deaths for which Riddle was responsible by the time of his first exile from the ww left bodies. Nobody disappeared.

In the *ONLY* instance where we have been directly given to understand, in canon, (not after the fact in an interview answer) that Riddle's primary reason for attempting to commit a murder was to create a Horcrux, the *UNintended* victim (i.e., the caster) disappeared, leaving no physical trace. No AK which we have observed has ever behaved in this manner.



I repeat: in the absence of a dementor; to remove a soul from its body requires a death. The natural death of a 3rd party has no effect upon the 1st party's soul. I suspect that the deliberately caused death of said 3rd party normally has no diminishing effect upon the soul of the 1st party either; although the 1st party may be required to stand in temporal or spiritual judgment for their actions regarding their level of responsibility for that death. And even if damage to the murder's soul is sustained, in normal persons remorse will go at least some way in healing it.

The curse which splits off, and ejects, a fragment of the soul

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of its own caster provides the required “death” of the caster by using that of a proxy, a live, intermediate temporary housing, whose death serves to split off a portion of the caster’s soul, which is then redirected into an external housing to keep it from ever passing through the Veil.

So. Just what did Lily do to disrupt the process?

And why did that disruption do what it did?

And, just exactly *what* did the disruption *do*?

And why is there *no record* of it in the Priori Incantatum log which we watched play out in the graveyard of Little Hangleton? Or is there?



Harry’s dementor-assisted memories of the event are really very strange. Harry has no emotional connection to himself in them at all. It’s rather like a Pensieve playback with the video turned off. Or a radio play. Rowling claims that Harry did not see his mother’s murder. No doubt this is *supposed* to account for it. (Although she showed us quite otherwise in the DHs “flashback.” Harry was definitely able to see that.)

Well, okay. We all agree upon the basic hypothesis that Lily died to protect her son/her son was protected because she died instead of him. No one is arguing about that.

At this point my theories diverge irredeemably from what we were shown in DHs. And frankly, I still think my version is better-built than *that*. (It would be hard not to be.)

I think that in defiance of the “flashback” in DHs, Tom did not simply kill Lily when she wouldn’t cooperate. And, unlike in my earliest hypothesis, there wasn’t any formal “contract”

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that she established between them, of her life for Harry’s. She did not trick Tom into such a contract. The “contract” which resulted from her action wasn’t actually a contract, and it wasn’t expected. It was indeed a product of “magic at its most impenetrable,” She didn’t know the projected result that would take place from her action.

But she may have been reasonably sure that what she did might save her baby.

Once, anyway.

I think she pretty much instinctively threw herself into the path of the Horcrux-creation murder spell.

Before it could reach Harry.

Whether she knew *just* enough about the principles involved to know that the Murderer and the Victim must share a soul, or not, she knew that her husband was dead, and she was not going to stand meekly by and watch her son be murdered. She was probably making every bit as useless a gesture as Bellatrix did in marching off head-high into Azkaban. But she was *not* going to stand by while her son was murdered right in front of her. If Voldemort did not cast the curse non-verbally, she knew that it wasn’t an AK, and may even have hoped that her getting in the way of it would cause the spell (whatever it was) to mis-fire in some, probably spectacular, manner, which would buy Harry some time.

With no certainty of what would actually happen to her. Maybe.



Let’s take another look at the possible order of action here.

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Possession does not require touch, Lily's sacrifice would not keep Tom from *possessing* Harry, but it kept him from killing him. A death *did* result from that spell. In fact the physical death of the caster *also* resulted from it. So the soul fragment was still split off, but the fragment was not forced from Harry's body because Harry did not die.

Indeed, as with all Dark magic, the caster's intent matters far more than it does in common domestic wizardry. Tom's very determination to create a Horcrux from this murder enabled him to do o, even though he completely lost control of the process.

And Lily's sacrifice transmuted into Tom being unable to "touch" her child. The Horcrux that Tom created in Harry might one day jerk him around, but it could not retain *possession* of him. To do that Tom had to make the attempt himself from outside. And when he did that it threw both of them into agony. Tom would never again be able to possess Harry without incurring consequences that he did not wish to invoke.

I now find myself wondering whether the shrill voice Harry heard laughing in the later portion of his dementor-assisted memory of the event was his own — after Voldemort took possession of him. That was the point in those memories where Lily stopped pleading, and started screaming.

Tom intended to kill her child in front of her, and make some unspecified use of her for his own purposes. He didn't believe that she could do anything to stop him.

Okay, let's try this version on for size:

- 1 He breaks into the room, fresh from murdering James, laughing the patented Evil Overlord cackle™ Lily gets between them and pleads for Harry's life. He orders

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her to get out of the way. She doesn't.

- 2 He takes possession of Harry. He didn't need for her to get out of the way to do that.
- 3 Harry starts laughing with Tom's voice, Lily glances at him in horror and screams.
- 4 Tom steps to one side and throws the Horcrux-creation spell past her, while she is distracted.
- 5 She catches him at it and throws herself in the way of it. Just in time.

It killed her. Consequently there is no record of any failed spell in the Priori Incantatum log. Lily's echo serves as a record of that spell just fine. After all, nobody else *died*. But it couldn't create a normal Horcrux from *her* death, since her soul was not shared by the caster of the spell. The historically documented Horcrux-creation spell requires that the Victim and the Murderer share the *same* soul. Destabilized, the spell rebounded, looking for its caster's soul. And found it.

Actually, what it found was two *fragments* of its caster's soul. I'm not sure that the fragment still inside of Tom's body was so much larger than the one in Harry's for the energy of the now uncontrolled spell to tell which was which.

We've already seen that rebounding spells can do damage greatly in excess of their original intent. Protego, which *causes* spells to rebound carried Harry some way into Snape's memories, rather than just evicting Snape from his own. Gilderoy Lockhart completely wiped out his own memory when a defective wand caused a simple Obliviate to rebound.

When the Horcrux-creation curse found the soul it was looking for, it didn't just kill the perceived Victim, it allegedly

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destroyed the container housing the incomplete soul. It is generally believed to have vaporized it. If this is what indeed actually happened, I'm not altogether sure that this wasn't partially *because* the soul in that container was incomplete. The Horcrux-creation spell is designed to be used on bodies harboring an *excess* of normal soul, not a deficiency of one. At the same time, the misfiring spell's energies also seem to have been conducted through the still open connection between the two portions of the shared soul (which Lily's interference had inadvertently kept from being broken) to attack the fragment of the soul which was possessing Harry as well. It is probable that this extreme level of destruction was the result of there being no proper "grounding" between Murderer and Victim.

A tremendous amount of psychic energy must be necessary to split a soul from a 3rd-party's death even when it works the way it is supposed to. Something which vaporizes a physical body might well be on the level of a very small, very contained nuclear blast. (This suggests that if a small, localized "nuclear blast" is at risk of taking place upon the site of the creation of a Horcrux, then it is best to create one out of doors in an area where the energy burst is unlikely to find any particular targets. Out in a field or a meadow — or a stone circle — might be most appropriate.)

The energy released in such a blast *may* very well have been what blew out the wall of the room. But I'm NOT going to commit to that view. That spell had already found *three* different victims, killed one, allegedly vaporized another, and injured a third. I don't see any reason why it would go on to damage an inanimate object like a house. I'm more inclined to think

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that the explosion was Pettigrew sowing confusion when he snatched Voldemort's wand and made a run for it.

For that matter, the whole event might be brought even more into scale if we also postulate that the rebound did not *vaporize* Tom's body, only killed it. And that Pettigrew vanished the body to forment confusion by raising a mystery.

After all, it's not like we don't canonically have Pettigrew at the site of an even more deadly explosion not much more than 24 hours later. Even if that one was a combined effort, since Sirius Black had managed to get a spell off at Pettigrew, too.

Like I say, underestimating Pettigrew is usually a mistake.

But, we are not dealing with an AK here. An AK might cause localized damage where it hits, and punch a hole in a wall, but it does not generate the power to blow one out. I will agree that the destruction at the Potters's house *may* not have been due to Peter Pettigrew sowing confusion after the fact. Although we cannot completely dismiss that possibility, either.

When the curse rebounded, it effectively produced a *form* of Horcrux from Lord Voldemort's own physical body's death, rendering *himself* both Murderer *and* proxy, and which split his soul into the bargain. Small wonder the pain was beyond describing.



It is evident within the text that something definable as a Horcrux was, in fact, created in this spell-gone-awry. But it was not a typical one, nor was it captured in whatever artifact that Voldemort had intended to house it in. By the time the process reached the point where the caster is supposed to cap-

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ture and house the soul fragment in an object, Voldemort had completely lost control of it.

Thus he “marked” Harry Potter as his “equal”; being now possessed of the inherent qualities necessary to vanquish the Dark Lord, in accordance with the Trelawney prophecy. Assuming that you are prepared to give any credence whatsoever to the Trelawney Prophecy.

As a Horcrux himself; moreover, as one in which the connection to the original source was never broken, to all of the other Horcruxes, Harry Potter ought to have been indistinguishable from their creator, for he and they all share the same soul. Up until the botch-fest of DHs this premise appeared to hold quite steadily. Harry had handled the Locket, the Diary, and the Diadem, all without invoking any response whatsoever. Only when he actually wrote in the Diary did he activate the “user interface.”

As Dumbledore points out, there is a risk involved in creating a Horcrux from a living entity which can think for itself and take independent action. Probably almost as big a risk as taking Prophecies at face value.



The portion of Tom's soul which had been sent into Harry to possess him was severely damaged by the magical backlash of the rebounding spell, although it was neither killed, nor ejected from its housing. (We cannot be sure whether the scar was produced by the malfunctioning curse attacking the fragment, or the fragment attempting to escape its housing.) It was, however, rendered incapable of continuing to possess Harry. And it was never able to do so again.



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The backlash, however, appears to have shorted out any memories native to the fragment, as well as all sense of its own identity. Otherwise it might have managed to reestablish possession and control him in the same way in which the Diary fragment which had possessed Ginny controlled her. Possibly even despite Lily's protection. Over the course of the series it appears to have been completely incapable of doing anything of the kind.

(Unless it actually had done so and the Harry Potter we know really IS the spiritual clone of the former Tom Riddle — which would put us all back to square one of my original Changeling hypothesis. But I really doubted that Rowling was going to be taking us in that direction, and in fact she did not.)

The portion of Riddle's soul embedded in Harry scarcely recognized its own former name and unlike the fragment in the Diary it had no access to any of the memories of its creator. Nor does it identify with him. It is a mostly-quiescent passenger. Although the fact that Harry is a Parselmouth was an indication that the fragment was still present.

And even though the fragment behaved as if it had been Kissed, or at the very least, Obliviated, it was still alive and it was still a fragment of Tom's soul. And Harry was still a Horcrux. A *defective* Horcrux, perhaps. A Horcrux *by default*.

But a Horcrux, nonetheless.



Which raises a number of questions: If you can only create a Horcrux by possessing the Victim and then killing him, then by the opening of OotP Tom ought to know perfectly well that Harry is still carrying around that piece of his soul, simply by



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reason of the existence of the connection between them.

How long was it before HE was aware of that connection? He didn't start trying to use it until after the Christmas break and the debacle of the snake in the Ministry.

Was he prepared to simply sacrifice that particular soul fragment to the grand gesture of murdering Harry in the full view of all his followers during the graveyard assembly? Because he certainly intended to kill Harry in the graveyard.

Did he believe that because Harry was clearly NOT under his control, that that particular fragment had been lost when his original body was killed? Did he only become aware of their connection later?

That much is certainly possible. It is also possible that he felt the gesture of murdering the child said to be his downfall in the sight of all his possibly doubting followers would have been worth the sacrifice. (Not to mention neutralizing that irksome Prophecy.)

I think we can dismiss the fact that QuirrellMort almost killed Harry back in Book 1. QM was trying to get the Stone away from him, not commit a murder. And the Revenant in CoS either did not realize that Harry was effectively another Horcrux, or, possibly, did not care. Harry's scar did not react at all to the Diary Revenant (although it really *ought* to have). It is unlikely that the Revenant had any reaction to him, either.

Which raises another question. The Revenant was generated from a soul fragment housed in a Horcrux. It must have *known* that its original source was still alive. The fact of its own existence should have been proof enough that the original source could not die. You have to wonder what its intentions

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were toward its (now known to be disembodied, since Ginny had told him about it) creator. But this is a side track, and not likely to be a particularly productive line of inquiry.

And, returning to the point here; if Tom knows (at least by the end of HBP) that Harry is carrying around his missing soul fragment, did the fact that he could not properly possess him again in the Atrium at the end of OotP come as a surprise? Or was that the point at which he finally realized that the boy not only was still carrying around the fragment, but that there was something *wrong* with it. That he could not use the fragment to take full control of Harry. And that he could not effectively possess him twice.

As well as the fact that the scar somehow served the boy as a warning system.

Because the screwup at Godric's Hollow appears to have also done something like reversing that fragment's polarity.

Now, rather than the fragment being drawn to its original source it is repelled by it. When the two are brought into physical proximity the fragment appears to be thrown back into the same state it was in at the point of the divorce from its origin. Even to open the connection from a distance could set it off if there was a strong emotional charge sent through it.

But in the absence of being used as an emotional conduit, it seems to have been at least hypothetically possible that the connection could be used merely for observation. For it appears to have been *being* used for that purpose all through OotP. We got quite a few instances of that sort of thing in the course of that book. (And a LOT more of them, in the other direction, in DHs. Although pain was always present on Harry's end during

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those. Tom, however seems to have remained unaware of Harry's visits.)

At some point during OotP, even if not before the opening of the story, it seems inarguable that Voldemort became sufficiently aware of his connection to Harry to attempt to use it as an observation post, and these attempts did not always, or did not always *immediately* provoke a reaction from the scar. This campaign on Tom's part ultimately ended in disaster. To the point that by the opening of HBP he had taken to using Occlumency to block the connection.

Albus Dumbledore claims that Voldemort found the attempt to take possession of Harry and use him as a hostage at the end of OotP too painful to sustain. I do not know whether this is another of Dumbledore's mistakes, one of his fibs, or what, because we did not actually get to witness that attempt. Harry was too overcome with the pain of the contact himself to be a reliable observer and we never got an outside point of view. There had certainly been no indication that Voldemort found his new ability to physically touch Harry the summer before painful to himself, although that was certainly still painful to Harry.

They had certainly had no trouble both hitching a ride with Nagini. I think Lily's protection having originally been proof against both physical touch and any future psychic possession to be a viable hypothesis. But Lily was not able to drive Tom out of Harry before he killed her. And the soul fragment was stuck there once there was no other viable place for it to go.



Physical proximity continued to be a problem. Although Tom

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was able to get around the ban on physical contact from his end by creating a simulacrum which bore a blood relationship to Lily. Indeed, although Voldemort's attempt to counter the restriction lessened the effects of the reversed polarity, it was incapable of eliminating it. Harry was still thrown into pain once he was in physical proximity to Lord Voldemort, and any physical contact was excruciating. There doesn't appear to be any really viable way for Tom to recreate for himself a housing which can touch Harry, or even to get near him without setting the scar off.

And unless the pain issue is entirely due to something that Lily did, it made me doubt very much that Nagini was another Horcrux. She would not be so cooperative if she could not get near Tom without pain (Ergo; evidently the pain was due to what Lily did and did not apply to Nagini). I really did think that the snake was more likely to be under Imperius than that she was actually carrying around a piece of Tom's soul. He could possess her when he needed to hitch a ride. He did not need to keep her possessed. Keeping her spellbound ought to have been sufficient.

But in any case, the fact that Harry was carrying around a bit of his enemy's soul in his forehead has somehow managed to gift him with at least a trace of his enemy's abilities and power. Such as being able to understand Parseltongue. For whatever use that was worth.

And, no, I did not think that Dumbledore was being entirely straight with Harry concerning what he suspected might have happened. If nothing else, Dumbledore has always been reluctant to tell others things that he only suspects; remaining non-committal until he can show proof of his contentions. Dumbledore also seemed to have rather more faith in the

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innate power of good over evil than appears to be really warranted under the circumstances.

Nor did we ever have access to all of Dumbledore's sources of information. That could also have made a difference in his decisions.

But I really do think that we have come very close to one *possible* answer to the question of what Lily *did*, in a manner that made some kind of sense according to the material we had to work with before the series completely shredded itself, and which accounts for the probability that Harry inadvertently ended up becoming a Horcrux.

And that creating a Horcrux is technically a one-step process. Tom just plain didn't get a chance to make 2 tries at it.



Which brings us to the question of how Albus Dumbledore managed to figure out what happened from examining the scene of the crime. Assuming he ever actually did so.

Dumbledore did seem to have figured it out, at least in theory, because he knew just enough about the traditional creation of a Horcrux to know how it was *supposed* to have worked. And to tally that up against what *appeared* to have happened.

The lack of a body for Tom, combined with the disappearance of the Dark marks (which had already been reported by Snape), as well as (possibly) the damage to the house, was destruction on such a level that it might well have suggested that an improperly grounded spell had gone violently wrong there. And, since (at least after the fact) Albus already suspected that Tom's intention must have been to create a Hor-



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crux from Harry's murder, the fact that Harry was alive, but Lily wasn't, would have suggested to him that she had thrown herself into the path of the spell, destabilizing it. Albus, after all, did have access to the documentation regarding how that spell was supposed to work, and knew it needed to be grounded.

As early as the end of PS/SS Albus is able to tell Harry, with complete confidence, that Harry lived because his mother died to save him. Either this is something that he knows because a willing sacrifice is known to be the only thing that will effectively block the Horcrux-creation spell, or he has deduced that Lily gave her life to save Harry because Hagrid reported that Lily's body was in the room where Harry had been found, and there is no other ready explanation for Harry's survival. Or for the Harrycrux, which Albus must have also suspected.

Otherwise, how do you account for his having that particular piece of information? He certainly wasn't there when it happened. If you remember, he didn't even know who the Potter's real Secret Keeper was. Got an anonymous letter, did he?

If he was confident that he knows what spell was used, having already confiscated the references to it, then he at least had some chance of figuring out what must have gone wrong with it, just from the report of the conditions which Hagrid found there.

That Harry was now scared suggested that something new was in play that Albus couldn't anticipate. But the possibility that the boy was now a living Horcrux could hardly be either ignored or dismissed



An extra bit of soul might also explain Harry's peculiar irresist-



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ibility, as well as much of his heightened vulnerability to dementors.

An additional magical “transfusion” also goes a long way towards explaining the number and severity of Harry’s accidental childhood magical break-throughs, since as a corporate entity he had too much power for any immature wizard to be able to effectively control or suppress.



But at any rate, this is the product of my latest attempt to unravel the Gordian knot presented by the question of just what *did* happen at Godric’s Hollow, on Halloween, 1981.



Regarding the Potterverse Part II

With 20/20 Hindsight

A second, closer look at some of the things we thought we knew.

The online version of the collection places this sub-collection after the one devoted to Missed Opportunities. But to place it here seems to be more appropriate for the .pdf version.



The Framing of Rubeus Hagrid

I contend that it was due to neither accident nor matter of mere convenience that got Hagrid decked out in his “fall togs” the first time that the Chamber of Secrets was opened. I think Tom Riddle had already fully intended Hagrid to take the blame for any resulting unpleasantness from any episode of Tom’s devising that might call for a patsy.

In fact; in view of some questions raised some years back on another fan’s LiveJournal, one has to ask whether “getting Hagrid” might not have been a part of Riddle’s plans even before the Chamber of Secrets was opened. In fact, one might even ask (and Swythiv did do so) whether the goal was to “get Hagrid,” or to get Hagrid *under obligation*.

Just where did Hagrid get that acromantula egg? Hm? Did that egg get to him by a route similar to the one by which he was later given a dragon’s egg?

And, Echo answers us nothing.



Young Hagrid was probably already known to have a track record of trying to turn monsters into pets, and it was obvious to anyone who laid eyes on him that he was at least part Giant. If there ever was a Hogwarts student unequipped to keep a low profile it would have been Rubeus Hagrid.

Whose Giant parentage would be immediately confirmed as soon as anyone snuck a look at his school records. Tom may have had more than one bird to kill with that particular stone-turning monster. And I suspect accident had nothing to do with either of his victims.



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I would imagine that; my speculations regarding Caractacus Burke notwithstanding, having landed in Slytherin as a Muggle-raised outsider, Tom Riddle was, nevertheless, quickly VERY well aware of the sort of prejudices concerning both part-wizards and part-humans that were shared by a lot of people in positions of authority within the wizarding world.

Young Tom was fully prepared to make use of any of those prejudices whenever he could turn them to his own advantage. And the prejudice against part-humans is one that its holders don’t even seem to try to conceal.

Well, I think we all know what kind of people are determined to advance themselves by upholding and vehemently defending the belief that other persons who are (usually visibly) different are necessarily inferior. Some of them even make a practice of running about after dark in hoods and masks and setting off flaming symbols of their disapproval. Some of them were doing so even back when Riddle was a tiny tot. Although not necessarily in the Potterverse. Nor in Great Britain.

Regardless of whether anyone knew of Tom’s half-blood status or not — Headmaster Dippet certainly did not recall it; Tom himself could not have known of it when he arrived at Hogwarts. I imagine that he only was fully convinced of it once he finally tracked down Morfin Gaunt — and that wasn’t until he was 15 — even Dumbledore claims he only pieced the official Riddle backstory together after Riddle had finished school and had embarked upon his life of crime. But prior to that, Tom would probably have been at pains to discover who could safely be thrown to the wolves should a sacrifice be required.

Riddle was very clever; brilliant even. Or, at any rate, he



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passed for it when he was a boy. He might merely have been precocious. But he wasn't — in his middle teens — particularly subtle. Neither, for that matter, was Hagrid. Hagrid still isn't.

Even if Tom didn't set the wheels in motion himself over the business of that acromantula egg, as a newly appointed Prefect, Riddle probably very soon stumbled across the fact that Hagrid was trying to hide yet another one of his appalling "pets" inside the Castle. Acromantulas do talk after all, and baby Aragog had no reason not to (you will have to forgive me as I avert my eyes from the prospect of a spider the size of a cocker spaniel cooing and gurgling in baby-talk). In fact, I would imagine that Riddle had a track record of quickly discovering any number of students who were probably trying to hide secrets, and he probably made use of them too, over the entire course of his school career.



So, Hagrid already had two counts against him and Riddle knew that anyone with the typical wizarding attitude towards Giants would automatically be disposed to believe Hagrid capable of anything. From where Riddle was standing, Hagrid was simply begging to be set-up, and this had probably always been an intrinsic part of Riddle's general fall-back plan. Indeed, back in the days that Tom was working alone, he tended to make a point of assuring that there would always be someone else in the vicinity who could readily take the blame for his own doings.



Which brings us to Dumbledore's intervention on Hagrid's behalf.

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That wasn't the first time, after all.

One of the members of one of my lists reminded us all that Dumbledore tells us in CoS that it is the Heads of House who are responsible for any punishments carried out upon their students. If Dumbledore was the Head of Gryffindor House back in 1943 (which I don't believe), he doesn't seem to have been able to keep Hagrid from being expelled. Either feelings were running far too high at the time to dissuade the Powers That Be, or perhaps I am *not* talking through my hat when I keep insisting that Albus certainly doesn't act like any other Gryffindor we've met.

For that matter, considering all of the information regarding Albus which we had dumped upon us over the course of DHs suggests that Albus was probably never the Head of any House, either. Albus is highly reluctant about taking responsibility for other people's welfare. He'd tried that once and it didn't end well. He never wanted to do that again, although as long as he insisted on maintaining his "smartest person in the room" reputation he got shamed, or pushed into the situation more than once. But if he had ever been a Head of House, Hermione would not be invoking sources like; "they say" about which one he had been in. Everyone would simply know.

In any case, as a member of the Faculty, Albus not only had good reason to already know Hagrid (since you can just tell that Hagrid was the sort of fecklessly fearless child who was ALWAYS blundering into some sort of hot water or other) and to have been absolutely confident that Hagrid had not been in any way responsible for the death of another student.

What is more, as I say, we've got very good reason to believe that this was not the first time that Dumbledore had weighed

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in regarding the welfare of young Rubeus Hagrid. Whether he was the boy's Head of House or not. Or at least to have gone so far as to have made a few helpful suggestions regarding the boy.

Indeed, I suspect that Dumbledore had already taken what counted as notable responsibility for Hagrid's welfare (well, notable at least by Albus's reckoning).

Which actions I think may have contributed mightily in painting that target on Hagrid's back in the first place.

I'm not altogether sure that Riddle may not have been nursing a personal grudge which targeted Hagrid, dating from the previous year.

If you stop and think about it, you will remember that Hagrid's father died during the previous academic year, leaving the 12/13-year-old boy effectively an orphan. The boy also appears to have been left with no remaining human relatives to take responsibility for him.

There do not appear to be any wizarding orphanages, and the Ministry was hardly going to palm *Hagrid* off on a Muggle one. So, in the course of the general flapping over what to do about this situation, who can we think of that is the most likely candidate for having been the one to have stepped forward and make the suggestion that Hagrid be allowed to remain at the school, or in the village, over the following summer, under the supervision of someone Albus could have talked into obliging (Aberforth, not impossibly, now that I think of it). He may have even volunteered to stick about and keep an eye on the situation himself, effectively taking on Hagrid as his ward.

We have never heard Hagrid mention any relatives apart from his dead father and his absent mother (and, nowadays,

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his younger half-brother). But he sure talks about Dumbledore a lot. And his gratitude to Dumbledore sounds like it could well be based on something more than Dumbledore's simply having found him a job inside the wizarding world after he was expelled from school.

And, given Hagrid's tendency to tell all of the world his business, Dumbledore's "patronage" of Hagrid was probably already widely known throughout the school by the following year. So widely known that it even raises the possibility that getting Hagrid expelled may have been an intentional dig at Albus Dumbledore.

By another boy who was also an orphan, and consigned to Muggle hell over the summer break. A boy at whom Dumbledore had taken one look, and distanced himself.

Could Riddle have simply been jealous of Hagrid? By Riddle's 5th year he must have been aware of the weight of influence that Albus Dumbledore's name carried in the wizarding world. Even before the Grindelwald business. Indeed, this was during the period that the wizarding world was clamoring for Albus to come and settle their Grindelwald problem for them.

Is that why Hagrid's prospects within the ww were summarily demolished within a year of his having been taken under Albus's patronage and shown his favor?

Again, Echo answers us nothing.



And just what *about* that job that Dumbledore arranged for Hagrid?

Groundskeeper. Right there at Hogwarts, under Albus's eye.

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Where Hagrid could roam the Forbidden forest all he wanted and visit his pets, chat with the Centaurs, and find monsters to make friends with. A job that Hagrid would love.

What is more, it is a job that he would be extraordinarily good at. Working with Ogg (who Molly Weasley recalls at length with some fondness) to look after him and train him.

I am absolutely convinced that Dumbledore had either already discussed Hagrid's future with Ogg, or had already been planning to do so well before Tom Riddle had even found the entrance to Salazar's Chamber. If Hagrid was already effectively Dumbledore's ward, even if only by default, Dumbledore had every reason to be taking a hand in providing for the boy's future.

And besides, did anyone really want Hagrid wandering about at (very!) large outside of a wizarding district if anyone could avoid it?

He couldn't keep the boy from being expelled, however. Because, despite the general perception that Riddle "framed" Hagrid, in strict accuracy, Riddle did nothing of the kind. The infraction for which Riddle had reported Hagrid, Hagrid was absolutely guilty of, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Riddle had reported that Hagrid was trying to raise a dangerous monster inside the castle. And Hagrid was.

Unfortunately, since it was (also quite correctly) believed that Myrtle had been killed by some variety of monster, the authorities chose to connect the dots and assume that it was far too unlikely to propose that more than one child was leading monsters around Hogwarts to feel they needed to look any farther. Riddle had gambled that this would be the case. Hagrid was not "officially" expelled for being suspected of accidentally kill-

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ing another student. He was expelled for recklessly endangering other students by raising dangerous monsters inside the castle.

Given that the expulsion probably had to go through the school authorities, the Board of Governors, and, most probably, the Wizengamot before it was approved, the likelihood that there were more people involved in this "coup" than merely Riddle, Hagrid, Dumbledore and Dippet is fairly high. And Riddle already had plenty of "friends" with powerfully-placed families, and a dislike of part-humans, whose support could be enlisted.

They might have even had connections who could have procured an acromantula egg.



Another suggestion made quite a long time ago by another member of one of my lists looked rather promising for a while as well. That suggestion was; given Hagrid's obvious discomfort at all of the questions Mr. Ollivander asked about Hagrid's broken wand, there seemed at least some possibility that the wand actually snapped at Hagrid's expulsion was a substitution. And that Hagrid's pink umbrella was not merely concealing the pieces of his broken wand, but was the (unbroken) wand, itself, transfigured.

This was at least partially clarified in Rowling's March 2004 interview in honor of World Book Day. Hagrid's wand apparently was snapped. But the umbrella is the once-broken wand repaired and transfigured. An umbrella is the sort of thing one might expect a groundskeeper in Scotland to need to keep always available. That the umbrella in question is pink sounds like a bit of pure Albus-style flippancy. The "umbrella" disguise

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conceals the fact that Hagrid has access to a functional wand — when he is not supposed to.

Had Hagrid's wand not been the one snapped, I think the most likely wand to have been snapped in its place would have been poor Myrtle's. As a Muggle-born, her family had no use for a wand. It might have been left with the school.

But that is a line of reasoning that is no longer required.

What we do not know, is precisely when Hagrid acquired that pink umbrella. The Elder wand seems to have been perfectly capable of mending Harry's broken holly wand. And by some point in 1945 Albus had possession of the Elder wand. So it is entirely likely that if the broken wand had been transfigured into an umbrella in '43, by the time Hagrid came of age in '46 that umbrella may have contained a perfectly mended and functional wand.



For that matter, I am also not convinced that there was anything even remotely accidental about the selection of Myrtle Warren as one of the targets for the Basilisk, either. Yes, that was targets, plural. Myrtle's was the only death, but hers wasn't the only attack. And I suspect the fact that she was Muggle-born may have been purely in the nature of a value-added bonus. I think that Riddle had very close, very personal reasons to want to make an example of young Myrtle, for her very own sake.

I suspect she'd had the nerve to try to make him look bad in public.

Think about it.

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It really isn't very likely that Myrtle's typical behavior was any different in life than it is in death, is it? Particularly since I suspect that ghosts are incapable of learning anything new. And hers isn't the kind of "act" that has ever benefited anyone but herself.

Myrtle likes being the center of attention, and she discovered early in life that the easiest way to broadcast a bid for sympathy and attention is by making yourself out to be the victim of others' unkindness. Nor is she at all ethical about setting up her performances. And she doesn't play the least bit fair.

So here is Tom Riddle, 5th year Slytherin Prefect and all-round Golden Boy of Hogwarts, with a fine romantic background as a poor orphan, raised by cruel Muggles, and nevertheless is still the most brilliant student of his year, yadda, yadda.

And this misbegotten mudblood brat hadn't the slightest compunction about setting up a howl that he has insensitively "hurt her feelings" over some possibly quite readily justifiable action or remark made, possibly in the course of his Prefect's duties!

You know she pulled that one on him.

She did it to *everybody*. She's still *doing* it.

To be frank, Little Miss Myrtle was a menace to everyone who had to deal with her, and Riddle wouldn't have appreciated having his carefully-tended glowing reputation held hostage by anyone. It's almost surprising that Myrtle survived to her second year.

Given the odds, Tom was probably not exactly innocent the first time he took a poke at that particular sniveling younger year. But he provoked far more of an uproar in response than he had bargained for. And it made him look bad, and that offended him. He expected to be the one in charge of any uproars in his

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vicinity, thank you.

Of course she'd weighted the dice so you couldn't win, either. If anyone tried to dodge that particular bullet by avoiding her she would be just as likely to set up the howl because they hurt her feelings by not speaking to her. And people couldn't simply discount everything she yowled about because there were people (like Miss Hornsby) who had clearly figured; "well, screw that," and *did* deliberately go out of their way to torment her, very much in the light of performing a public service. Professional victims do frequently manage to attract quite genuine bullies.

Like Tom Riddle.

What I think finally happened is that at some point, around the time he had at long last found the entrance to the Chamber, and had been setting his new pet at his schoolmates for a week or so (he hadn't managed to actually kill anyone — which didn't particularly disturb him, the uproar alone was more fun), At some point earlier that year, Riddle had also come across the information regarding the creation of Horcruxes in one of the banned books stored in the Room of Hidden Things — which he had been steadily working his way through for some time.

The spell which Slughorn had been hyperventilating over was only a part of the equation. In order ensure that the damaged fragment of soul would fully detach, it was necessary to possess the victim before killing them. The actual spell documented may have been a spell sequence designed for accomplishing possession before murdering the victim during the process.

Only... possession, like Parseltongue, seems to have been one of Tom's innate talents. I think he may have taken that information as a "sign" and started extrapolating whether it might

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be possible to create a Horcrux, using possession only — which would produce no residue of a banned spell, and create no wand record. At worst, he wouldn't manage a Horcrux, but he'd pay that annoying little brat back, and be rid of her. In case of repercussions, he'd throw that oaf Hagrid under the Knight Bus.

So, the next time he overheard someone (possibly Olive Hornsby) snickering about Myrtle being off howling in that particular bathroom, yet again, he felt it was just too good an opportunity to miss.

He made sure that the room was empty except for Myrtle (not difficult. The other girls were probably no fonder of sharing a loo with Myrtle alive than they are about sharing it with her dead), slipped in, called the Basilisk and simply waited until she popped out of her stall like a jack-in-the-box to set up a howl about there being a boy in the girls' loo.

And then he possessed her, and forced her to look at the Basilisk. Which *did* produce a detached fragment which he trapped in his heirloom ring.

Easy.

Dead easy.

If he'd really thought it through he might have just let the Basilisk eat her and avoided most of the subsequent uproar. A disappearance of an unpopular student, probably wouldn't have closed the school. But perhaps he wanted to see what the School would do about it. Or maybe he didn't really want his tool to start getting the idea that students were food. It would obey him, but there is no point in stretching one's luck.

Or, possibly, he was worried that after a full meal of 12-year-old the Basilisk might not be able to get back down the pipe.

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For the record, despite the probability of there having been all sorts of wild rumors flying about, it is now clear that no one at the time (not even Dumbledore, perhaps) was altogether convinced that the legendary, and generally regarded as apocryphal Chamber of Secrets had actually BEEN opened back in '43. Otherwise more people would know about it now than just Lucius Malfoy — until Draco Malfoy got the opportunity to spread the information around. And when any roosters were slaughtered (very quietly the first time round, I suspect), the significance was probably not evident to anyone on staff until well afterwards.

This is the kind of detail that Dumbledore may have only recollected when the Chamber was reopened in Harry's time, confirming his suspicions that, yes, there evidently had been something in a few of the whispers that were floating about fifty years earlier.

And at this point we come up against another major piece of missing information. We don't know how long Riddle's little terrorism campaign with the Basilisk had gone on fifty years earlier. We were told that there was a similar series of close-calls back then. But we don't know just when in the school year it had started. Or the frequency of the attacks.

We can also pretty well assume that whatever form of "death to mudbloods" rig that Tom Riddle may have been running at the time (if any), Salazar Slytherin or the Chamber of Secrets was never mentioned in connection with it.

In fact, on the (very!) off-chance that Riddle may have been

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known or been suspected of being the last descendant of Salazar Slytherin — and Albus Dumbledore was already aware that Riddle was a Parselmouth — any association of Slytherin's Chamber with this sudden threat to the school would have been extremely dangerous to Riddle. And Riddle has always been very reluctant to endanger himself. (Apart from creating Horcruxes, which is reckless endangerment taken to a whole new level.)

For which reason I also very seriously doubt that Riddle would have gone around writing his intentions on the walls in chickens' blood when he was out and about taking the risk of discovery on his own. He didn't have someone else to do the dirty work for him that time.

Post-HBP we now know with some certainty that Tom was not ready to publicly admit to any connection with the Chamber, or to its monster or possibly even to Salazar Slytherin, himself (although he was willing to flash the Peverill ring about) while he was actually in school and likely to be suspected. He also probably deeply regretted having confided his ability to speak to snakes to Albus Dumbledore.

Diary!Riddle claims that he already had intimate friends by the time he was a fifth-year student, who we assume to be his early followers. It seems fairly evident to me that he did not confide in these friends about having actually found Salazar's Chamber. (That, I think only a very select few were told — and only told many years later. i.e., quite possibly only Lucius, or more likely, Abraxis Malfoy in 1981) All that seems to have been known in '43 is that something in the Castle was attacking students.

In fact, given that Diary!Riddle claims that it took him 5 years

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to find the Chamber, he may have initiated his reign of terror at Hogwarts only a couple of weeks before Myrtle's death, quite late in the academic year. Rapidly bringing about the attendant threat that the school was to be closed early and himself sent back to London.

[Note; I've always been of the opinion that the scene he shows us inside the diary of his having gone to ask to stay at Hogwarts over the summer break was actually a fishing expedition to discover what Dippet and the staff intended to do in response to the death of a student, rather than a simple request to not be sent back to London. The request to stay, much as he might have liked the opportunity to make himself free of the Castle over the summer, was primarily a cover. A very good one, too, given that his orphanage was in London, from which, in our world, children were being evacuated in 1943. The evacuation of children from Greater London seems not to have happened in the Potterverse, however. And quite possibly neither did WWII.]



Until the release of HBP, I was never convinced that Dumbledore necessarily suspected Riddle of being behind the attacks at the time they were taking place.

He did NOT believe Hagrid was responsible for the attacks. But to suspect that Riddle was isn't necessarily an automatic alternative.

While Dumbledore clearly wasn't blinded by Riddle's charm like the rest of the staff, I thought that he may very well have thought that Riddle had made an honest, if spiteful, mis-

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take. The boy was only 16, and there was no question that Hagrid's having brought an acromantula into the Castle was an extremely dangerous piece of mischief on a high enough level that an inexperienced, Muggle-raised 5th year might quite reasonably have concluded that he had found the source of the attacks on the students (well, they were looking for a *monster*, weren't they?). And, in fact, it was clearly judged to be mischief on a high enough order that even after Hagrid was ultimately cleared of all suspicion of involvement in the matter of Myrtle's death, 50 years later, he has still not been re-instated as a wizard and permitted to officially replace his wand.

Post-HBP it is much easier to believe that Dumbledore might have suspected that Riddle was somehow behind the attacks. But did not speak of the matter because he could not prove it.

However, it should be noted that he does conspicuously *not* count Myrtle as one of Tom Riddle's own murders, either, however much he may consider Tom responsible for her death.

That there was no further such trouble in the Castle once Hagrid was no longer living in it would have gone a long way toward adding uncertainty to even Dumbledore's understanding as to just what had been going on. If nothing else, he would have concluded that whoever was responsible had been frightened enough by the results of his mischief to make an end to it.

These days, I rather think that Albus Dumbledore only felt a burning need to try to locate Tom Riddle — and his ring — after interviewing Morfin Gaunt in Azkaban at some point after his meeting with Grindelwald in 1945. Around which time, Albus no doubt felt himself forced to reevaluate everything he knew of young Tom Riddle from a different perspective.

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That the danger at the school had apparently ended after Hagrid's expulsion might have also gone some way among the people who kept records toward the impression that perhaps it wasn't Hagrid's monsters which had made the attacks, but Hagrid himself. An impression that came back to bite him when the Chamber was opened the second time.

As for Hagrid's "secret" parentage; at least two generations of Hogwarts students have grown up familiar with the presence of the groundskeeper's overgrown assistant, or, later, with the overgrown groundskeeper. Some of them no doubt concluded, like Hermione, that he must have Giant's blood. But, until Harry's 3rd year, he was the *groundskeeper*, not a part of the staff that the students needed to deal with on any kind of regular basis, so they thought nothing much about it. It was only when the fellow became a teaching member of the faculty that this became an issue. And, really, considering what a feckless teacher he proved to be, you have to conclude that this was not one of Dumbledore's better decisions. One seriously has to wonder what Albus thought he was playing at.

Given that the appointment was only made after Harry had filled out his class choices for 3rd year, you also have to wonder whether it was made primarily to give Harry a bit more of an opportunity to interact with Hagrid. And for Hagrid to be in a better position to keep a protective eye on Harry whenever he was outside the castle.



And it was only when suspicions of Hagrid's parentage were confirmed in the most blatantly sensational way possible, that the

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wizarding world seemed to have felt it needed to kick up a fuss.

And that the fuss, when it came, wasn't nearly as big or even as long-lasting as the brouhaha over Hermione's romantic "treachery" toward their hero, Harry Potter, would tend to indicate that it was no more than an eight-days' wonder for anyone who actually remembered Hagrid.

(Which would have been just about everyone who was anywhere near Hogwarts since about 1940. Hagrid is memorable.)

And, given that the larger percentage of the letters received were in support of Hagrid, it would be reasonable to suggest that the end result was more in the nature of a benefit than otherwise.



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Well, by now, this essay has been shoved down the track to the point that I think we may be coming in at the station. Even though it does expend a great deal of time tracing the progression and development of the sequential theories related to the matter through several of its earlier iterations — all of them theories that Rowling either foreclosed upon, or that I finally just abandoned because they didn't answer the underlying questions.

But, as of around 2012 or 2013 I really did think that I had finally figured it out.

Warning: this piece is LONG. And it works its way through several earlier iterations of theories, now abandoned, more or less in the order that they had developed over the past 20+ years. Yes, that's right. It's now been well over 20 years since the publication of 'HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN', which is when we first learned about the werewolf caper.



The readers of the Harry Potter series have known *about* the werewolf caper ever since 1999, when PoA was released and Remus Lupin and Sirius Black finally filled Harry in on just why Snape had spent the first three books behaving like an arsehole to Harry (even as he was trying to save the kid's life), and, incidentally, gave us the story *behind* the "official" reason that Snape hated Harry's father (as given to us in brief by Dumbledore back in book 1). Not at all coincidentally, this explanation also very economically covered the probable cause of Snape's detestation for Lupin and his outright loathing of Sirius Black.

It was a really clever bit of exposition. Sketched in without

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much detail, it gave us *just* enough solid information to grab the ball and run with it.

In the wrong direction entirely, it would now appear.

Or at any rate so it now appears after the train wreck of DHs, when we — most unexpectedly — had it thrown in our faces that the disgraceful exhibition which we saw in our Pensive junket with Harry during the Occlumency lessons sequence of OotP had taken place *after* the werewolf caper, rather than before.

I do not think that there is a single reader who would have guessed that those two incidents took place in that order. Not until Rowling insisted on it. It is an utterly *destructive* order for those incidents to have taken place. And, for her to insist on it destroyed a great deal of the glowing regard for Harry's parents upon which the reader had expended so much effort over the previous eight years. Indeed, that revelation amounted to outright character assassination. (Which, after the fact, it appears that Rowling may very well have deliberately intended.)

In any case, that particular bombshell managed to throw shrapnel in all directions.

But, by that time, having forced the reader into the position of supporting Harry's viewpoint (mainly by giving us nothing else), most of us felt we had rather a lot invested in attempting to regard James Potter and his friends as favorably as Harry did.

And, one must not forget, as favorably as James Potter & Co. undoubtedly regarded themselves.

It now rather looks like Albus Dumbledore isn't the only utterly vain and self-congratulatory character who managed to completely convince Harry that he was on Harry's side. Nor the only thoroughly hypocritical and ineffective one, either.



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Rowling stated years ago that there was more to the incident we saw in the Pensieve than we had been told yet, but if that is the case, she still hasn't chosen to tell us significantly more about it now. Nor, insofar as incidents we *haven't* seen, it should probably be noted that she has *never* offered us even the slightest glimpse of the werewolf caper as it happened, either.

Rowling has changed her mind so many times on so many subjects after giving us statements of intent that were never followed through on, that it is way too easy to simply chalk this up as another of them.

But the addition of that passing reference to the werewolf caper — which has clearly already happened — in the course of a nagging session from Lily *before* summarily dumping that long-established friendship with Snape, in itself tells us nothing of what brought either incident about, nor what any of the participants meant by it. We are just going to have to go back to square one to try to figure that out for ourselves.

Which pretty much forces us to deconstruct the visit we all paid to June 1976 in the Pensieve, and, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight take another look at what we thought we saw.

Warning: this is NOT going to be a *pleasant* trip in **any** particular.



Frankly the way that Rowling tried to dress it up and shove it at us really doesn't work. Not unless Rowling was trying to say something altogether different from what we *thought* she was showing us.

In retrospect, I'd say she was so bound and determined to

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conceal the fact that Snape and Lily had once actually been considered to be friends, in order to lob that at us as one of her bombshells in the final book, led her to construct a grand exhibition of character assassination of everyone present for it once we finally had that bit of context to apply to what we were shown. But by the end of DHs I still can't be altogether certain whether deliberate character assassination of all and sundry might not have been *exactly* what she intended. For "character assassination" certainly appeared to be the overriding theme of DHs from where I was sitting.

And whatever that "something else" she was trying to convey may have been, it wasn't very nice. And it definitely did not say anything nice about Lily Evans, who at that point we had all really wanted to be able to think well of.

But now we can't. We really can't. The shallow little user that Lily Evans was depicted as in DHs fully deserved to end up with a bullying lout like James Potter.

Who turned out to have been even worse than he came across in OotP.



For what it's worth; even circa OotP rather a lot of fans were inclined to wonder whether Snape's lashing out at Lily Evans for trying to "rescue" him might not have been an inherent component of just what made that particular memory so awful to him. After all, they do tell us, a painful memory is just as likely to be over something 'unworthy' that you did as it is to be something that was done to you. And I agree that they were making an entirely valid point. But I was not completely

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convinced of that interpretation, either.



Although, given my views of the Pensieve junket, I did already suspect that Snape's lashing out at Lily may have been not just relevant to, but a major reason for showing us that particular disgusting exercise.

It certainly had a major impact on everyone involved. Indeed, calling Lily Evans a mudblood carried some of the most long-range consequences of any action taken by anybody in that whole episode. At least by the standards of a 16-year-old James Potter. (And, as it now turns out, it set the foundation for a lifetime of regret for Severus Snape as well.)

But if Rowling had been legitimately trying to show us a decisive moment in which a long-standing, mutually valued friendship was irrevocably destroyed, she did a very poor job of it. There is absolutely no indication on Lily Evans's part which would suggest that she still considered Severus Snape any kind of a friend *whatsoever* by the time James Potter and Sirius Black publicly attacked him on the school grounds during OWLs week. Certainly nothing that we were shown in the course of that specific episode, at least.

Completely leaving aside how completely, irrationally, *insanely* jealous James Potter must have been to think that attacking and publicly humiliating Lily's pet geek was going to impress her to his *benefit*.

Especially when he presented the whole issue as if he felt that his attention toward her was doing her some sort of a whacking big favor.



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We still seem to be missing a major piece of the puzzle, here.



So, let's take a reality check.

And try to make yet another overdue re-evaluation of just what went down in that little donnybrook. At least trying to keep in mind the point of view of what we knew at the time we were shown it, compared with what we know now.

Reread the Pensieve incident. Reread the lead-in to that attack on Snape.

James makes very sure that he is in full sight of those girls by the lake (who he had been keeping track of with brief, sidelong glances as he was showing off with the stolen Snitch) before he abruptly — and loudly — addresses "Snivelus". He is playing this scene to the balcony. Or at least to his audience of admiring schoolgirls.

And, I'm sorry, but does Lily Evans really come across as a girl who was rescuing a friend?

Does she even come across as someone who is sticking up for somebody she knows personally?

No, not really.

At best she reads as a girl who is conspicuously "doing the right thing" in the sight of all observers. That is certainly the pose she appears to be striking. And "doing the right thing" must have had everything to do with why she is getting involved, for we certainly can't discern any *other* reason from her behavior. Not from what is actually written there on the page, anyway. And even when Rowling revisited the scene again in 'The Prince's Tale' you will notice that she didn't bother to show us anything



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in addition, that we might have missed the first time.

This whole performance is a courting display designed by James to get Lily's attention.

And she knows this.

And she is willing enough to play up to it.

Okay, he got her attention. She barged right in like a one-girl rescue squad just like she was expected to. It was right there in her script.

Of course, she also probably knew that if she didn't, the whole exhibition was only going to get worse. ("I'm a bad, bad boy and I'm going to keep on doing this until YOU make me stop!") She has picked up James's gauntlet and stepped right into her assigned rôle.

But you'll notice she doesn't address any attention to Snape. Not one word; she doesn't even spare him a glance to see whether he is all right, even though he is hanging upside down and choking on soapsuds. She freezes him out from the beginning, and ignores him entirely.

Excuse me, but that is not a rescue of a friend. This is not even *pretending* to rescue a friend. This is being publicly seen to "do the right thing." Snape himself doesn't matter. He's just a prop. Lowly set-dressing.

If she had really wanted to put an end to this exhibition wouldn't she have, oh, I don't know, gone, or sent one of her girlfriends off to *fetch a teacher*?

And, as it played out, she even had to suppress a smile when James had first Levicorpused him, putting the greying underpants on public display. She wasn't acting outraged by James's behavior. She was basking in every minute of publicly being the

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focus of the popular James Potter's *attention*.

Snape and his well-being isn't even on her radar. This is ALL about James. And, of course, *herself*.

Some friend.



And now I wonder whether Snape might have had *just* enough objectivity to recognize that.

Or the intuition.

Or even just the paranoia.

I mean, c'mon, how "perceptive" do you have to be in order to recognize an act of public betrayal when it's rubbed in your face! As Rowling has chosen to write it, Lily has clearly already *made* her decision to cut Snape loose and hang him out to dry. Even if she is only just now putting it on full display.

If you ask me, that's what makes this memory so utterly horrible. If he had ever viewed it in that Pensieve himself he could have scarcely missed it. That is the point that he *realized* that she was no longer his friend. And probably hadn't been for some time.

Despite Rowling's belated attempt to backpedal and ramp Snape's cluelessness up to epic levels, retroactively in 'The Prince's Tale', I fail to be convinced. Even as socially inept and unpopular as Snape seems to have been by 5th year, he probably wasn't as clueless as Harry. Rowling spent the whole 7th book dismantling our understanding of Albus Dumbledore. It needed more than just a few perfunctory paragraphs to do the same for Snape. Over the past six and a half books she had established Snape as being much too sharp to not have been

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aware of *something*. And there was nothing even remotely subtle about that performance.

At the very least, he could tell that he was being used by both of them. As a stage prop. And he was furious. He was also probably deeply hurt. Lily — who, post-DHs we now know had been nagging him for months, if not years, about his Slytherin acquaintances — who he *couldn't* have shed, and they knew where he slept — was publicly treating him like dirt and now had clearly sided with his enemies against him. She was using the whole situation as an opportunity to strike poses back at James (who you realize that she had to have been taking a great deal of interest in, in order to have such an extensive list of criticisms to later make).

And Snape smacked her down for it. As hard as he could.

And at that moment he *meant* it.

He would have had to be something other than human not to.



So, now let's go back and take another look at this scene now that we all know that not only was Lily *supposed* to be Snape's best friend in the world, but that the werewolf caper had already taken place. What *else* changes?

Well, right from the top, Lily's refusal to spare even the slightest effort to assure herself of Snape's welfare certainly doesn't say much for the quality of her friendship. In fact it now comes across as just plain cruel. The received message is that she may be stepping in and "doing the right thing" but Snape had better damned well not get the idea that she's doing it on *his* account. Or at any rate, that's the pose she is striking for



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James Potter's benefit.

Frankly, she's looking like about as much of a bargain as Tom Riddle Sr.

And what *about* James Potter? We suddenly have a rather nasty backstory inserted here. He supposedly saved Lily's pet geek's life some time ago, according to him. (And of course saved his own friends from consequences. *And* the staff of the school from embarrassment.) Or at any rate that's how the matter seems to have been explained to Lily, because she's already rubbed Snape's nose in it, and charged him with being *ungrateful*.

And just how did Lily find out about that business anyway? Snape didn't tell her. He had a vow of secrecy forced on him by the Headmaster. It sounds to me like someone went out of their way to make sure that she should learn about it. Or, James's *side* of it, anyway. And Snape wasn't free to say a word in his own defense.

It finally occurs to me that Lily was probably a lot more deeply involved in bringing about the werewolf caper than she had any business being. And I'm no longer convinced that she *didn't* have a hand in that. Even if she did do it inadvertently.

She was mighty quick to shove Snape's indebtedness to James in his face, wasn't she? Yet, in all fairness, she didn't really sound like she was all that impressed with James, either. And in the course of that same conversation it is also made quite clear to the reader that Snape's suspicion that Lupin was a werewolf had already been discussed between them.

Which Snape has also not confirmed to her, even though he knew his suspicions were absolutely right by that time —



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because he has already been sworn to secrecy.

And now I am beginning to wonder; if she is so quick to throw Snape's rescue by James in his face, whether she might not have been just as quick to throw Snape's suspicions regarding Lupin in James's face. Or Sirius's.

I think we may have just found our information leak.

And, for that matter, we've probably also found the leak which first raised Snape's suspicions of what Lupin's problem was, too.

I'm going to have to admit that by this time, *nothing* about the werewolf caper strikes me as being especially spontaneous. Not now that Rowling has switched the timing of the incident to before the Pensieve junket. And, when you stop and consider, it's always been tacitly admitted that Sirius knew about Snape's suspicions when he fed him the lure of how to get down into the tunnel.



And the fact that James had *already* allegedly saved Snape when he initiated that disgraceful exhibition at the side of the lake now very much makes me suspect that perhaps the right handle for getting hold of what was really going on that day is that James was dragging a strictly private matter out into the public arena, and demonstrating that since he had already saved her pet geek, then *she* was under *obligation* to him. And if she really wants him to leave her ugly puppy alone, they need to negotiate terms.

And he'd go easy on her, *really*.

And then, his hostage, Snape, derailed the whole performance by calling Lily a mudblood.



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And he did it, not directly to her, but to James. Insulting his choice of object.

So just what happened after he let fly with that dirty name? How did Lily take that? What did she do?

She was shocked.

Absolutely shocked. Very much as if she had suddenly found herself being cussed out by a chair or a table. Originally I drew the conclusion that Lily must have got a lot better treatment over her years at Hogwarts than Hermione had.

Now we can all understand that she had taken it for granted that, however she might treat *him*, she had never believed that Snape would ever *retaliate*. It was completely unthinkable that *he* should ever retaliate.

Unforgivable, too.

She got knocked right out of James's little psychodrama and was abruptly looking at it from the outside. And that may have been a bit shocking, too.

Suddenly their little pigtailed-in-the-inkwell "schoolhouse romance" had turned into a real *incident*; and it was a *nasty* incident. And *it did not make her look good*. Her lapdog Snape had essentially bitten her, and James had deliberately provoked the whole thing!

Well from what we were shown of Lily in DHs it is clear that anything that goes wrong is never going to be Lily's fault. Not in her nice cozy worldview anyway. She is as every bit as good at deflecting the blame as Albus. And she doesn't really *care* very much as to where that blame ends up landing.



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She flatly disowned *any* obligation to *either* of them! Right then and there!

First; she clambered up on her high horse and attempted to save face with a quick recovery and some retaliation on Snape.

And then she turned around and completely blew up at James.

And then she flounced off, leaving him going “Wha...?”

That may have never happened to him before. Certainly not from a girl that he was interested in.

I originally believed that Lily Evans was cringingly embarrassed to have ever gotten involved in such a disgracefully public exhibition, *recognized* that it was a disgraceful exhibition, was furious with James, furious at Snape, and angry at herself. Now I can see that she was simply furious at both of them and riding a wave of self-righteousness. How *dare* they try to burden her with *obligations*! She doesn't owe *either* of them *anything*!

She did not even just go back to her group of girls by the lake, she left the field altogether.

But she'd already maximized the damage, by then.



So now; let's fire up the wayback machine and take a survey of the kind of theories one could still come up with before Rowling rubbed our noses in the alleged truth of the matter, and we could still try to give all the little twerps the benefit of the doubt.



Dateline 1999: we've just been given “the official backstory” in the grand reveal of ‘HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER



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OF AZKABAN'. The main thing that everyone who was there seemed to agree upon was that the hostilities between James Potter and Severus Snape had been ongoing from the beginning of their Hogwarts “careers”.

Another understanding which enjoys a general consensus among the readers — who are always inclined to follow Harry's lead in the matter — is that neither James nor Remus knew of the werewolf “trick” before it actually took place.

In strict point of fact, it was Harry who leapt to that conclusion. No one else present actually made that claim. Or ever confirmed it.

Keep this in the back of your mind as we continue to explore various possibilities.

We'd been given no reason in PoA to suppose that Harry's informants were deliberately lying, but Lupin neither confirmed nor refuted Harry's stated conviction that Remus had not known of the plan, and neither did Sirius Black.

At that point in the series, it was simply too difficult for any of us to imagine any version of the incident wherein Remus would have agreed to make such a use of his “condition.” Even this far down the road, based upon only the information available at that time, the idea still seems far too difficult to entertain.

But from where we are standing *now*, it is no longer impossible. Not now that we've seen what a pack of filthy little curs the Marauders actually were.

The third thing that we were told regarding the matter is that the whole affair was completely hushed up, and only those persons actually involved in it, such as the Headmaster (and presumably the Hogwarts staff) ever knew about it. The rest



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of the student body never found out. And for some eight years we assumed that this included Lily Evans as well.

Until Rowling showed us differently. And that little reveal makes *quite* a difference, too.

Possibly all the difference in the world.

The fourth detail that everybody agreed upon was that Sirius Black was the one to set the situation up. We did not know how, we did not know why. We did not even know whether he did it alone.

We were, however, all willing to take a stab as to when. Not that we ever actually arrived at a consensus.



Before getting properly into that business, however, I probably need to add a couple of riders.

First; a reminder that this is a LONG trip down memory lane and covers the development of several theories past, over a number of different stages, over a period of close to 15 years. All of which I intend to at least try to delineate, even though most of these iterations have since turned out to go nowhere.

Second; I probably first need to summarize a whole other theory which is gone into in detail in the piece entitled 'The Malfoy Connection'. It has some impact on the issue of Snape and his housemates, which in turn has some impact on where the Marauders were coming from in regards to their choice of targeting Snape.

That particular line of reasoning was relevant to the development of a great many of my earlier theories about what else was going on during the Marauder era. And that particular ele-

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ment was not disallowed by Rowling's big reveal in DHs. It's still on the table, even if not quite in its original form.

For that line of reasoning to work, we need only to be willing to consider that Lucius Malfoy, even while at Hogwarts had at least a clue about the proper way to build and to maintain a following. He was another one of Slughorn's favorites, after all. Slughorn's own personal mission has always been to teach the students he deems likely to be able to make use of the information how the system works, and how to work the system.

In the first place, you don't limit your potential following to your own year group. And indeed we've been given some confirmation since PoA, which suggests that kids from the same general social backgrounds tend to group together in Slytherin House, possibly without regard to their exact year, which increases the overall influence of the *group*. In the lower years, Draco often tagged along after the rest of the Quidditch team, all of whom were older than he. (Harry, by contrast, only seems to have interacted with his other team members during practice sessions, although he remained on good terms with them, particularly the Weasley twins.)

Inside this scenario, according to Sirius Black; Severus Snape, who showed up at Hogwarts with a predilection for the Dark Arts and a remarkable stock of homemade hexes and curses, seemed (according to Sirius Black anyway) to have been "taken up" by the Black/Lestrangle circle of "cool kids"

Since we have never seen ANY indication of any degree of residual friendship between Snape and Bellatrix, or, for that matter between Bellatrix and Malfoy, and we do get heavy hints that there is a long-standing association between Snape

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and Malfoy, the simplest conclusion to draw is that, unless Sirius is talking through his hat and any association between Snape and the Lestranges took place after all of them were out of Hogwarts, then, at some point there must have been a cooling-off or a falling out between Snape and the Black/Lestrangle crowd and a transfer of Snape's affiliation to Malfoy.

What to me seems most likely is that Sirius is simply not remembering those associations in the proper order. 12 Years of getting up close and personal with Dementors will do that to you, and Sirius certainly never got anything like counseling for it. It also seems likely to me that Malfoy's circle was to some degree a rival of Bellatrix's, and replaced hers in influence once she and her contemporaries had finished school. Rowling's subsequent endorsement of the Lexicon's 1960 birth date for the whole Marauder cohort makes this reading more difficult to support, but not impossible. (The chief difficulty is placing Bellatrix in the school at the same time as Snape at all. It is stated outright in canon that she was, but this can only be facilitated by completely dismissing the birthdates on the dodgy Black family tapestry sketch. Which, admittedly, is no great imposition.) Since it *is* canonical, I will continue to attempt to postulate a Snape/Lestrangle association at Hogwarts, however. Unlikely as it seems.

I also suspect that Severus Snape, like Hermione Granger, probably was better at projecting a favorable image to people older than himself than he was at relating to his own immediate peers. Once he was accepted by Bellatrix's "junior DE's" circle, he didn't bother to build additional alliances with members of his own year group and ended up being considered stuck

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up without any legitimate cause, and consequently unpopular. Even inside Slytherin House.

This is even more likely to be the case since his own background was hardly out of the top drawer. He no doubt spent much of his first years at Hogwarts determinedly trying to learn to "pass" as a kid from his patrons' perceived social level. In short, he was a social climber. And a successful one. Upon the whole, this did him no favors with the Marauders either.

This overall perception was, if anything, consolidated when his affiliations transferred to Malfoy and his slightly younger group of cool (and perhaps even richer) kids. Possibly before the end of Snape's first year, certainly by the first term of his second.

Given Sirius Black's relationship with his own family, the Black/Lestrangle association alone would probably be a large part of why Snape was targeted by James and Sirius and their little pack. Particularly after a bad mutual impression was made on the Hogwarts Express, which we were eventually shown in DHs. With the backing of the Black/et als. set(s), Severus may even have had the upper hand in the hostilities between himself and James Potter and his friends for their first couple of years at Hogwarts.

However, Bellatrix had to have already been a 7th year when Severus arrived, and even Malfoy had probably finished Hogwarts by the end of Snape's 2nd year. Narcissa Black also had probably finished school the at the end of his 4th. Leaving only "Mulciber" and Avery who may have been originally a part of the Black/Lestrangle crowd, but had also later transferred to Malfoy's, as the highest status group available once Bellatrix and the Lestranges had finished.

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As a side note, regarding Mulciber; I suspect that Rowling did not consult her notes to double-check precisely who these people were before doing sitting down to write 'The Prince's Tale', recalling only that both Avery and a Mulciber were mentioned in GoF and that Sirius Black had given us the names of a number of Snape's future DE associates in that particular installment. Avery had indeed been mentioned as one of Snape's "gang of Slytherins." Also that he, like Lucius Malfoy (who, interestingly, was *not* identified by Sirius Black as one of Snape's associates in GoF), had got off on an Imperius defense. Mulciber however, (who also was not named by Sirius Black at all), only was mentioned in Karkaroff's plea bargain hearing, as one of Voldemort's Imperius experts. A Mulciber had also cropped up in HBP as one of the DEs who accompanied Riddle to the Hog's Head at the time of his job interview with Dumbledore upon his return to the ww after his 10-year exile, roughly around 1960.

Obviously any Mulciber at Hogwarts (and at that point we had never heard of one) cannot be the same man. We must retrofit and assume that one Mulciber is the first one's son, or nephew, or other relative, although it has not ever been openly established in canon that there were two different Mulcibers. Rowling would have done better to have used Rosier or Wilkes as her 2nd junior DE in the account of the Prince's Tale. And indeed I suspect that originally she may have intended to do so (why else did she bother to give Evan Rosier a first name if she intended never to refer to him again?) and was too distracted to cross-check. Or maybe she just likes the name "Mulciber."



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I suspect that Snape was probably the only one of Malfoy's group in his own year, although at least Avery and "Mulciber" were still in the school when Snape and his classmates sat their OWLs. They do not appear to have been in the same year as Snape, either, however. They were apparently not sitting their OWLs with him, or discussing them with him afterwards. He appears to have been entirely on his own.

That Sirius Black did not even think to mention Mucliber as one of Snape's school companions suggests — other than that Rowling simply used the wrong name — that if we can take Sirius Black's word on the subject at all, Mucliber occasionally permitted Snape to tag along after him, but did not treat him as a boon companion.

After Malfoy's departure, another member of the group would have probably taken his place at the top of the pecking order. Mulciber might have been this leader, or he might not. We have no information to establish this possibility as anything more than a definite maybe.

By 4th and 5th year Snape may have been progressively even more often on his own and the tables were turning. Certainly he would have been less often in company with Lily, who seems to have taken up with a "peer group" of other girls, and also seems to have taken her girlfriends' verdict regarding Snape (that he was a geek and a loser, and that she should shed him) to heart, and was gradually viewing him as an embarrassment and a social liability. That gaggle of girls would emphatically not have welcomed Snape among themselves and probably closed ranks, keeping him away.

Unfortunately, James & Co. did not regard their now superior



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numbers as any reason to ease off in their “get Snape” directive. There was already way too much of a history between them all for them to reflect that four against one was not fair. By the end of 5th year, as we saw in the Pensieve, Snape was twitchy and half-expecting attack at any moment. In retrospect, the werewolf caper having taken place earlier in the year probably had contributed no little part to this.

Also, at some point during this period, Lily had clearly caught James’s attention and the whole dynamic of the situation was now poised to get much, much worse.



In any case, skipping back to the information we had to reason from before the release of DHs:

I felt that I had ample reason to suspect that after what we saw in the Pensieve, Snape would have taken no statement from any of the “Marauders” at face value. Which made his insistence that Black “told” him how to get into the passage under the Whomping Willow rather curious, and very difficult to justify. (Perhaps that’s why Rowling reversed the timing of those two incidents. But I wouldn’t count on it.)

Something else that seemed curious, once one considered it, is the fact that from the minute that the werewolf caper was first brought up in the Shrieking Shack, all the way back in Book 3, on that single issue at least, the majority of readers have seemingly always been solidly on Snape’s side. Much as they may dislike him, no fair-minded reader has ever been in agreement with Sirius Black that “he deserved it,” regarding his being set up to be savaged by a werewolf. And that opinion

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became even more accepted once we were forced to witness the hazing attack on Snape in the Pensieve two books later.



We had also always rather supposed that the “werewolf caper” was deliberately set up by Sirius Black in advance. But one had to admit that it might not have been.

So, as of 2003 (post OotP), when I was drafting out my first revisions to this essay, the most plausible possibilities, so far as I could see them, came down to three basic models.

First; Sirius could have inadvertently given something away without realizing it until later. Post HBP, once we had an even better idea of the mental sharpness of the “Half-Blood Prince,” this definitely seemed a possibility that we ought not to overlook.

Second; the fact that Sirius supposedly did not consult James on the matter, given what we knew of the closeness of the friendship between them, suggested that Black, who was nothing if not impulsive, may well have seized upon an opportunity that presented itself without premeditation, or, indeed, any sort of forethought whatsoever.

Which is still no excuse. But it might explain a bit.

Or, Third; that Snape was right, and Sirius could indeed have deliberately planned it.

But why? And why *then*?

Well, that’s a big part of the question, isn’t it? Just when was “then?”



In common with just about everyone else, I thought it was a

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pretty safe bet that it was after the scene we witnessed during our Pensieve junket. Which is to say some time after the sitting of the OWLs at the end of 5th year. I could not imagine that disgraceful exhibition taking place in public at any point after the werewolf caper had already occurred. To engage in such an exhibition after such a close call with expulsion would require insane levels of arrogance, and a sense of bullet-proof entitlement which leaves Draco Malfoy's in the dust.

And it still doesn't add up to any kind of rational administration of a *school*. I mean, allowing that kind of a public incident — which was *exceedingly* public — without any hint of any kind of consequences puts Dumbledore's performance as a school administrator on close to the same level as the Carrows'. One belatedly allows that Lucius Malfoy's contention that Albus was the worst thing to have ever happened to the school might have a valid point. A public attack of that nature was an inexcusable breach of discipline. And nothing appears to have ever been done in response to it.

Taking the hazing incident that we saw in the Pensieve as our starting point, and stacking that kind of behavior up against what everyone (except Snape) has ever had to say about James Potter, I found the suggestion that this incident could have taken place after they had already been pitched into the consequences that followed the werewolf caper, to be insupportable. It is also very clear from the conversation among the Marauders leaving the Castle after sitting the DADA OWL that their monthly full-moon adventures "wandering with werewolves" is still a well-kept secret among the four of them. I found it hard to believe that Lupin's condition had already been discovered by anyone else.



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(Although, really, upon consideration, just about any female student above say, 3rd year, could probably have figured it out, if she took any sort of interest in Lupin and was able to concentrate on anything taking place beyond her own nose. One is being made rather forcibly aware of monthly cycles at that age.)

So, circa 2003, our parameters for the timing of the werewolf caper appeared to be that it could not have taken place before the end of 5th year, when the hazing incident took place.

It was certainly possible that the werewolf caper might have taken place at some point during 6th year. Many, if not most fans believed this to be the case.

Sirius, *actio* Snape, was 16 years of age when the werewolf caper took place, and he would have had to have reached his 16th birthday before starting his 6th year. However, most students' birthdays take place at some point during the school year, so they end the School year a (numerical) year older than they began it, even though less than a full calendar year has passed.

If Sirius Black was the eldest of the four with a birthday between September 2 and December 31, he would have turned 17 by the end of the first term of 6th year.

If his birthday was after January 1, but before September 1 he might have turned 16 at any point from January 1 to the end of the school year during 5th year. We have no hint as to which of these is the case. (Although the excuse that James was "only 15" at the time of the Pensieve junket is a flat-out lie. James had definitely already turned 16 by the time he was sitting his OWLs.)

We thought we could probably eliminate most of their cohort's 5th year from our reckoning. We do not know at exactly what point during 5th year all three of the Marauders



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had finally succeeded in becoming Animagi, but it probably was not accomplished until well into the year, and our Pensieve junket did not take place until the end of it.

We could also safely eliminate the period of the summer break following the end of the term, around June 30. None of the participants of that incident were at Hogwarts during the summer break.

However, I could not quite accept that the incident took place during the course of year 6, however obviously such a date might seem to fit.

Which, for me, nailed the timing of the werewolf caper to the very tag-end of June 1976.

Either during, or at the end of sitting their OWLs.

Right *after* the hazing of Severus Snape which we witnessed in the Pensieve. Probably before that week was out. Possibly in a spirit of retaliation for having been the cause of their own bad behaviour.

I still believe that this timing would have worked better than what we got if Rowling really did intend for the reader to be able to regard the Marauders as no worse than a lot of nasty, spoiled little brats who nevertheless managed to grow out of the worst of it.

But that apparently is not what she meant. So they evidently weren't.

Remember that.



However, this assignment was still supported by everything else that had ever been either said or shown to us regarding this

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event in canon up to the end of HBP.

In fact, at that point I was prepared to stick my neck out and say that I was convinced that the incident we witnessed in the Pensieve was an intrinsic part of the final run-up of hostilities that cumulated in the werewolf caper. And indeed, I did say so. For a couple of years. One *could* believe that right up to reading the events of 'The Prince's Tale'.

And got the rug firmly yanked out from under me thereby.

So what was it that we actually *saw* in the course of that incident back in OotP?

We saw James Potter stage an impromptu performance of; "I'm a bad, bad boy but you can make me be good," for the benefit of one Lily Evans.

We saw James's "stage prop" haul off and call Miss Evans a foul name, disrupting the show, bringing the curtain down on that particular act prematurely and completely derailing James's budding schoolhouse romance.

Which up to that point had been developing quite satisfactorily, thank you.

But that hardly explains why Sirius would have fitted Snape up to be savaged by a werewolf in return.

Or does it?

By the end of HBP I was totally unconvinced that Lily Evans had anything to do with why Snape had signed on with Dumbledore. But I was no longer so sure that she had nothing to do with why Black set Snape up to be cornered by a werewolf.

Lupin — who clearly knows how dangerous an unmedicated werewolf can be — refers to the incident as a "trick" that Sirius played on Snape. Dumbledore seems not to take Snape's insis-

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tence that Black was trying to murder him seriously. Although Albus may have been hinting at something else altogether with his rather odd statement that *his* memory of the event is as good as ever. (Actually I now think that this is in fact a fairly heavy hint as to the reasons for the various end results of that particular “trick.”)

But we never heard Sirius Black *deny* that it was attempted murder, did we?

We watched Snape cause James to lose his chosen girlfriend with one dirty name.

Up to that point she was clearly interested, and flattered by Potter’s attention, and everything was going along swimmingly, and all of it was on James’s terms. (Two years later, when they finally got together, I suspect it would have been on Lily’s terms.)

Snape called her a name. Which shocked her. And then she blew up at both him and James and stormed away, effectively declaring a plague on both their houses, and now (maybe a day or two later) she is probably still not speaking to James and giving him the cold shoulder.

Maybe Sirius thought that Snape ought to be punished for that. And if Lupin does make a meal of him, it’s no loss.



This was also the point in the series at which we found out that Snape had been right all along about the young James Potter being an arrogant, swaggering berk. Maybe, just maybe, he was right about Sirius Black as well.

So, I thought that after the episode that we witnessed,

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Snape might have been absolutely fixated on getting his own back on the lot of them. Particularly if the upheaval had also thrown him off his stride enough to have caused him to botch his DADA practicals that afternoon. In his determination to get revenge, he may have become at least somewhat incautious. (Boy howdy. Remember that as well.)

From Remus Lupin’s observed condition at the time of the pants episode, the full moon was obviously either rapidly approaching or just past, and I thought that it was likely that the werewolf caper played out within the next couple of days. (It should be noted that a cross-check with an almanac at this point is unlikely to be of any help on this issue. Rowling notoriously does not coordinate her story with actual moon cycles.)

Still, however incautious; I seriously question whether Snape would have believed or followed up on anything that any of the four Marauders would have *told* him about getting past the Whomping Willow if it was said directly to his face under anything like a normal circumstance. He would have expected some kind of a catch.

Given the glimpse we got in the Pensieve of their typical attitude and conduct toward Snape, it becomes interesting to speculate just how Sirius’s luring Snape to the Shrieking Shack was actually accomplished. Particularly since it has always been widely assumed that Sirius managed to do it without James’s knowledge.

Which, *prior* to OotP, made me suspect that Snape might have been led to believe that he had discovered the key to the ongoing mystery, and his opportunity for revenge, all by himself. And that the best way this could have been managed would

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have been for Sirius to stage a conversation for Snape to overhear while he was lurking about in the bushes spying on them. You need two people to hold a conversation. It was still widely accepted that neither James nor Remus knew about the set-up. Who does that leave?



Well, it is usually a mistake to attribute to malice and cunning what can amply be explained by bad timing and stupidity. Which in this case was probably amplified by irresponsibility, machismo and mutual stupidity on a grand order. We had already seen that even 20 years later any confrontation between Sirius and Severus was conducted at middle school level (at best). And it was probably only by the merest fluke that James wasn't on hand to have deflected it merely by his presence.

So here is another scenario which I thought played pretty well. At least before we had to deal with DHs:

In OotP we were given at least a few hints that the wizarding world may be a good deal laxer about alcohol usage than the Muggle one. And it has also been generally noted that the view on alcoholism in Europe is not so... *focused* as it is in the United States.

To be sure, we'd had comic drunkards in the storyline before that point. Hagrid and Trelawney are both in that tradition. But by OotP that tradition was not really being played for laughs. Mundungus Fletcher might have been pure comic relief a book earlier. Here, he was simply dodgy. And Sirius Black's drinking had become a source of considerable concern.

We already knew that butterbeer, widely marketed to teenagers, has at least a slight alcoholic content. This is accepted

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as a matter of course by everyone. We also see both Hermione (age 16) and Luna (age 14–15) with unidentified drinks of the sort served with paper umbrellas and/or cocktail onions in an establishment as reputable as the Three Broomsticks. In company with Rita Skeeter who is openly drinking firewhisky.

Which raises the possibility that underage drinking may also not be as difficult to accomplish in the wizarding world as, perhaps, it ought to be. (Even though Hermione's drink could just be Professor Flitwick's favorite tippie of cherry syrup, soda and ice, and Luna's something equally innocuous. The onion argues against it, but, then again, this is Luna. Vegetable accents appear to be a continuing theme there.)

Experimenting with alcohol is something that a great many teens simply do. And, one of the commonest demographics of the sort of teens who pull this particular stupid stunt are the "popular" kids. The ones "above" the rules, The nobs, the jocks, the swaggering "big man on campus" kids.

Kids exactly like Sirius Black. And, for that matter, like James Potter, too.

Who Madam Rosemerta recalls as having been frequent guests.

Two boys that we already know had access to a handy invisibility cloak to facilitate being where they ought not to be, and who we had just seen were not above "liberating," without permission, school property to which they were not entitled. Most typically from the Hogwarts kitchens — with which we have already been told they were intimately familiar. Nor, in their day was there much real difficulty getting off the campus and into the village. There were other still usable secret tunnels in addition to the one to Honeydukes' cellar back in the '70s. And Filch

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may not yet have known about some of the others, back then.

I feel I should point out that it is not necessary to postulate a pair of full-blown teenaged alcoholics here. Just a pair of irresponsible young scofflaws who did not consider themselves bound by rules that inconvenienced them. In fact the awareness that they were breaking the rules probably just added that much more spice to the adventure.

And it probably didn't happen all that often, either. But it is no stretch whatsoever to imagine that the occasional bottle of burgundy, or brandy, or whatever, may have disappeared from the kitchen stores on those occasions that there might be something for James and Sirius to celebrate.

I also suspect that these celebratory occasions did not necessarily involve all four of the Marauders.

Remus, as a Prefect, might not have felt he ought to take part in anything like that. And while Peter would have been quite eager to join them, and they may have sometimes let him, this is something that I suspect they more often did on their own.



Which brings us back around to the werewolf caper.

One finally concludes that Rowling fully intended that we should never be given any compelling reason to attempt to keep a good opinion of James Potter. I ask you; what kind of an unmitigated jerk reluctantly saves a person's life, presumably to keep his own friends from getting into trouble — and then takes it out of the victim's hide in public?

But at that point, we had to work from what we had been

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shown. While I find it next to impossible to accept that Severus Snape would have believed and acted on any information that Sirius Black might have told him when he was sober, he might very well have chosen to follow up on something that Sirius let fly while he was drunk and indiscreet.

If this is the case, it becomes not merely possible, but likely that the werewolf caper, as such, was not some elaborate set-up, or even planned at all.

And; if this was the case, since I doubt that the teenage Sirius was a solitary drinker, I suspect that it was only by some fortuitous chance that James was not present (or perhaps just not conscious) when Snape and an inebriated Sirius crossed paths and ended up getting into a confrontation.

And; that by the time James caught up with Sirius, Snape had stormed off and Sirius (possibly quite thoroughly hexed) was ranting over something Snape had done or said and not thinking at all of anything he had said. Until the recollection caught up to him, afterwards.

And; that Snape who now had every intention of following them past the Willow to catch them all up to something expulsion-worthy, did not stop to report his having encountered Sirius's drinking on school property. He was saving that up to add to the whole report, later.

And; if such was the case, and Sirius was drunk when he "sent" Snape to the Shrieking Shack, it becomes much easier to understand how Remus could have forgiven him for it.

Remus, who is the quintessential "follower" and all too often behaves as a classic codependent "facilitator," is very good at making allowances for other people's weaknesses. After the

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fact. Also for valiantly trying to protect his friends from the consequences of their own actions. It might even make some sense as to why Dumbledore apparently believed that Sirius had later revealed the Potters' whereabouts without investigating further. The werewolf caper may have been successfully hushed up, but Dumbledore remembers what is supposed to have caused it.

And this does at least absolve Sirius of plotting a deliberate murder.

Needless to say; at that point I still believed that the smart money was on the chance that, in the aftermath of the pants episode, Severus Snape managed to come across Sirius Black, alone, by some fluke, in a situation where there was sufficient evidence of rule-breaking to permit him to engage in a thoroughgoing "Aha!" confrontation about finally being able to get Black expelled; and that in the ensuing fracas Black incautiously let something slip without realizing it until much later.

Snape — who (unlike his creator) has amply demonstrated his ability to add 2+2 and come up with 4 — in hopes of being able to gather evidence against all four of the marauders, rather than just Black alone, delayed reporting the incident, pending further investigation. With the results as already stated in canon.

That certainly played. Rather well, I thought.

Around 2005, anyway.



Our continuing line of exploration at this point still pertains specifically to the timing of the incident, not the motives. Mind you, this next part was all extrapolated out before Rowling

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dropped her version of the timing on us in DHs.

So. About that timing:

To repeat; it was generally agreed upon by everybody connected with it that the matter was successfully hushed up.

By which I mean, that we were all strongly led to believe that neither Remus's lycanthropy, Sirius's perfidy, Pettigrew's possible complicity, Snape's peril, OR James's heroism was ever made openly known to the rest of the Hogwarts student body. Which included Lily Evans, unless somebody told her about it later. Possibly *much* later.

And I originally believed that a screw-up of that magnitude is a lot more likely to be successfully covered up during a period where the people who are most likely to notice that something is amiss — like the rest of the students in the group's own year — are already so distracted, anxious, and self-absorbed that breaks in routine go unremarked. In short, a period such as the two weeks during which the OWLs were being administered.

This particular timing makes it all the more likely that the staff was able to hush it up so thoroughly — since everybody was also sent home within a couple of weeks afterward.

In Harry's year, the DADA OWL was given on Thursday of the first week of the two weeks of testing. We do not know for a fact that this was the case in his father's day. It is possible that the tests are set according to a standard order. But it is also possible that the order in which they are given changes by the year.

However, if the DADA OWL in James's year was given on Thursday or Friday, the 2-day window of Remus Lupin's condition as the full moon approached suggests that the werewolf caper may have taken place on either that Friday or, even more

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likely, that Saturday night. With Sunday as a third possibility.

Second; we also have to consider the fact that James was undeniably Head Boy in his 7th year without having ever served as a Prefect. *Despite* that disgraceful display during OWLs week.

Post-HBP we now realize that he had probably been Quidditch Captain, which we were informed to be an equivalent office to Prefect. Rowling states that you do not have to be a Prefect in order to be Head Boy (although it certainly helps). James may not have been the first Head Boy to have gotten the appointment by way of the Quidditch Pitch.

However, until that possibility was handed to us, the fact that Remus was the male Gryffindor Prefect in their 5th year, while James became Head Boy in their 7th suggested that somewhere along the line there may have been a change-over, and it is easy to see how the werewolf caper taking place at the end of 5th year would have provided an opportunity to make such a change.

I wasn't convinced that Dumbledore and the rest of the staff would have regarded saving Snape at the end of 5th year as sufficient cause to just hand the Head Boy badge over to James two years later. Not when it was his own friends and his own actions which set up the situation that made saving Snape necessary in the first place. And particularly not when everyone was actively engaged in attempting to hush the matter up.

Or at any rate, I didn't think so at that time. I've had some second thoughts more recently.

One would certainly like to think that the Hogwarts staff were neither completely blind nor completely stupid. They may, in the aftermath of the werewolf caper have permitted (or even

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encouraged) Remus to give up the Prefect's office, for "reasons of his health" — which I suspect that he might have been all too willing to do by then. And transferred the office to James, challenging him with; "All right, you've shown that you at least know the right thing to do. Let's see if you can do it on a more regular basis." Any such transfer of office would have been much more convincing if it was decided upon at the end of the term, and arranged over the summer break rather than sprung on the whole student body, without explanation, in the middle of the academic year.

It has to have already been abundantly clear to everyone on the staff that Remus was vastly unequal to the task of keeping James and Sirius in line. Perhaps, now that James had gotten a strong wake-up call, he would be more amenable to policing both his own and Sirius's behavior. And Pettigrew's as well.

In addition, Severus Snape clearly knew good and well that Lupin was a werewolf, and, vows of silence notwithstanding, perhaps keeping Lupin on as a Prefect might not have looked like a wise move.

And, for all that they would have recognized James's apparent heroism in saving a fellow student, at considerable personal risk, I think that with his track record, the staff of Hogwarts would have wanted to see James "prove himself" for a reasonable period of time afterwards before they did anything like awarding him such an accolade as appointing him Head Boy. And I think that in order to keep the whole sorry matter under wraps it would have been necessary for them to provide some other public arena from which awarding the Head Boy's office to James Potter would have made sense. After the fact,

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appointing him Quidditch Captain for year 6 now seems the most likely method, assuming that he wasn't Captain already — which he may have been. He was certainly a Quidditch star by then. All of this reasoning still plays, even in the wake of DHs.

And for that matter, we do not even know what the competition for Head Boy was like in James's year. His having been appointed Head Boy may simply have been because he really was the best candidate in that year's field of possibilities. He could well have been appointed *despite* the werewolf caper (and the public hazing incident) rather than because of it.

In any rationally-operated school, being involved in such a disgraceful incident as the hazing of Snape during OWLs week would have blown his chances at becoming Head Boy out of the water, permanently. However as one of the participants in the (now departed) Café Dangereux put it: "boarding-school novels tend to be driven by plotting imperatives other than current best-practice administrative and teaching principles, (and to be preoccupied with themes other than the long-term potential of your adolescent protagonists' budding romances/ affairs/ whatever)."

In any case, whatever happened in the public arena that made James Potter Head Boy material would seem to have taken place over their 6th year. For it certainly didn't happen in their 5th. And I thought that it was quite possible that nothing in particular actually did happen apart from James turning over something of a new leaf and sticking to it. Or of his being the best pick of a sorry lot.



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Because the timing of those events was really not all that negotiable. Something had to have happened between the end of 5th year, when we saw James being a bullying git showing off to Lily Evans, and the end of 6th for James to have turned himself around to such a degree that he would not only have plausibly been appointed as Head Boy the following year, but would have also finally managed to convince Lily to go out with him after 7th year had begun.

Despite the clear indications that he was already crushing on "Evans" as early as the day we saw him sitting the OWLs, after the pants episode there was no certainty of it ever coming to anything, given the level of immaturity at which he was attempting to conduct his courtship. Particularly since we were all "privileged" to watch it blow up in his face. And from the information that we had at our disposal at that point, the werewolf caper seemed the most likely candidate for a life-changing event that we had to work from.

At that point, it still appeared to most readers that something must first have given him enough of a shock to force him decide to make a change, and that he must also have managed to sustain that "new leaf" long enough for other people to start believing in it.

I conceded that something else *could* have taken place during 6th year that made James look like a hero off of the Quidditch pitch. But I had no suggestions for what that something might have been, and I refused to try to pull yet another rabbit out of my hat.

And another vague, nebulous "something" was not necessary to the argument when the werewolf caper served the purpose so extravagantly well. If James was a Prefect or Quidditch



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Captain for his 6th year then, from the average student's PoV, all that was really necessary would have been for James to look like a better candidate for Head Boy than the other male 6th year Prefects or Captains. i.e., Looking like the best out of a field of eight to twelve.

As for Lily; James's parents were still alive until his 7th year (or at least so we have been led to believe), and died of natural causes. Being left an orphan at 17 might explain Lily's finally taking pity on him, but it had nothing to do with the Head Boy appointment, for, according to Sirius, he had already been appointed Head Boy by then.

In those days it was almost laughably easy to suppose that the werewolf caper was every bit as shattering an experience for James as the trip into Snape's Pensieve was for Harry. It seemed obvious that it had forced James to face exactly what his best friend really was. And that was a dangerously loose cannon with next to no moral compass or ethical sensibilities!

I rather missed those days in the aftermath of DHs.

We had been given to understand that James had saved Snape, whom he despised, because he wasn't going to stand by and see his friends commit a murder. And we were nearly all willing to believe that to James, as well as to Snape, it would have read as a "murder." James really had been set up as being a bright boy, as little as he might have acted it, and that he probably was capable of realizing that his years of picking on Snape "because he exists" had contributed substantially to the situation. It was quite easy to extrapolate that he had had to live through his own little "dark night of the soul" wherein he faced the fact that he had been letting Sirius lead him around

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every bit as much as he had led Sirius. ("I'm bored." «Do something about it» *et. als.*)

After the werewolf caper few of us believed that this was so much the case. I thought that after the werewolf caper James finally took the full lead of his little pack, rather than continuing as a co-leader.

I even thought that the werewolf caper may have been a far more obviously life-changing incident for James than it was for Snape, and certainly more than it ever was for Sirius Black who seems to have missed the point of this particular life-lesson entirely. I convinced myself that James went down from Hogwarts at the end of that year thoroughly ashamed of himself and determined that if he could save that utter git Snape just because it was the right thing to do, he could certainly throw some effort into saving *Sirius* — from himself, if nothing else.

And, since no good deed goes unpunished, he soon had Sirius camping out at his parents' house with him and ample opportunity to do it.



Because, now that we mention it:

We also have to consider the timing on just when Sirius Black ran away from home and went to live with the Potters.

With the werewolf caper in mind, the timing of Sirius Black's leaving home (at, he tells us, the age of about 16) and moving in with the Potters starts looking more than a little suspicious. There are few coincidences in a well-built backstory (which we could still convince ourselves this was, back then). The affair may have been successfully hushed up at school, but I could not

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see the families of the perps not being told at least something; and the fallout from that might well have been the last straw for the situation between Sirius and his parents.

Sirius's relations with his family had been strained for years, and his getting himself sorted into Gryffindor had probably only worsened the situation. (Harry is probably not the first student who has put on the Hat mentally shouting "Not Slytherin!") But this was almost certainly the event that finally sent him storming out and got his name blasted off the family tapestry. This kind of falling-out would also be more readily precipitated during the summer break when everybody in the Black household was face-to-face.

(I wonder just how our Sev got on with Regulus Black. They were in the same House even though Reggie was somewhat younger.)

I also contended that Snape was probably left conspicuously alone for some time after the werewolf caper. With the end result that any attempt, on Snape's, part to retaliate was likely to bring the staff down on him, hard, in hobnail boots.

Well, it certainly appears that I was way out in left field on all of those suppositions.

It is certainly beyond question that after James pulled him out of the tunnel to the Shack, Snape's most probable action would have been to go storming off to Dumbledore's office, demanding justice. Which in accordance with some of my own theories regarding the Snape backstory would certainly have provided an opportunity for Dumbledore to have a serious talk with this particular clever, prickly, somewhat solitary Slytherin boy — who had a pre-existing, connection with the Malfoy set.

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Since my own interpretation up to the release of DHs was that Snape had already been working for Dumbledore by the time the Trelawney Prophecy was made, I had to seriously consider this possibility. But we do not need to consider it in any depth here.



In the event, however, I think that the final straw regarding Sirius and his family was probably not likely to be fallout from the werewolf caper. Given the insistence that the whole affair was successfully hushed up, I've come to the conclusion that Albus dealt out secrecy cards all round and never told the Marauders' families anything.

Indeed, if what I now suspect went down is what actually happened, then the Marauders could have told Albus, in perfect sincerity, that Snape had figured out Lupin's problem himself. After all, *they* certainly hadn't told him anything. What they did (and none of the four of them even whispered the word "Animagus") might have not been as well thought out as it needed to be (which was a lie. It was *exactly* as well-thought-out as it needed to be) but it was *damage control*. Surely he couldn't blame them for attempting *that*?

However, where Albus probably managed to sweep the werewolf caper under the rug, and keep it from public knowledge, he was completely unable to do anything of the sort about the hazing incident.

And there is NO way that *Minerva* wouldn't have heard about that! That had been far too public for any possibility for covering that up. Particularly considering that it involved *two* of her own Prefects.

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If Minerva on a tear can strip 50 points *each* from a trio of 1st years simply for being out of bed after curfew, there is no way on earth that she wouldn't have contacted the families of the perpetrators for disgracing her House during OWL week.

And Reggie would, of course, have confirmed it.

So much for Sirius Black and his family.



I also rather thought that if the girlfriend Sirius's best friend James wants has just thrown him over because Severus Snape called her a dirty name, maybe Sirius Black believed that Severus Snape deserved to have something very nasty happen to him.

Maybe Sirius thought he was doing a friend a favor.

And, maybe I was still just missing something.

In fact, we all were.



In consideration of the information dumped on us (from a great height) in 'The Prince's Tale', if — given Lupin's condition at the time — the full moon was that close at the time of the hazing, we are forced to conclude that the hazing we witnessed may have taken place as soon as the day following the moon. In which case, just when is that argument between Snape and Lily, when Lily reproaches him over not being sufficiently grateful for having been rescued supposed to have taken place? That argument certainly did not take place after the public hazing. So we are forced to adjust our timing to Rowling's and conclude that the werewolf caper *had* probably taken place at least a

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month earlier than the OWLs. Possibly several months earlier.

Well, there is no reason to keep trying to tie the two incidents together in the face of *that*. In fact, it might be better to cut them loose and see how it plays if we can get the two incidents as far apart as possible.

So. Why are we so sure that it took place in 5th or 6th year at all?

Well, there is Sirius Black's being 16 at the time it allegedly took place. So that would tend to limit it to one of those two years. Other than that we have the statement made in passing that it took the Marauders close to three years to figure out how to reliably become Animagi.

For Harry Potter, that right there would throw it to the end of 5th year at the earliest. Harry never heard of Animagi until Minerva McGonagall turned herself into a cat it at the beginning of Year 3.

However, none of the Marauders were brought up as ignorant of the wizarding world as Harry was. I'll bet that wizarding-produced children's stories run into Animagi with some frequency. They're not at all limited to 'BABBITY RABBITY AND HER CACKLING STUMP'.

The Marauders had figured out Remus's problem by the end of Year 1.

The Animagus project could have started quite early in their Year 2. Cumulating by the *start* of Year 5.

And *if* the werewolf caper went down at some point in the *Autumn* term, and was successfully hushed up, and nothing more than a slew of detentions happened to them over it, they might have felt positively bullet-proof by the time they sat their OWLs.



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So, let's take a closer look at Black himself — and the situation he is said to have set up.

At least insofar as we understood it prior to the release of DHs.

Was Sirius Black *capable* of murder at the age of 16?

Yes. Absolutely.

But there was as yet no certainty that what he was attempting was in fact deliberate murder, and the rest of what we've observed of his character gives us fairly strong counter-indication as to whether he was ever capable of murder *in cold blood*. He certainly let himself be talked out of killing Pettigrew remarkably easily for somebody who had stated repeatedly that he had made that particular murder his pre-eminent goal for nearly a year. What was he waiting for, a signed permission slip?

If the werewolf incident was not due to an inadvertent or spur-of-the-moment piece of indiscreet talk in the heat of a confrontation, Most readers are inclined to agree with the majority view that still regards the notorious werewolf "trick" as having been a nasty, ill-considered, and dangerous joke in which the intended punch line was supposed to come when Snape screamed like a girl and ran away. But I was not 100% convinced of this, since Rowling had thrown us curves before, and I rather thought this was another one.

And, while we are at it, from where I was standing, Black's sullen comment in PoA that "He deserved it" does indeed suggest intent, (and ranks right up there next to Snape's "I see no difference" from GoF in the "most despicable statement ever"

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sweepstakes).

Unfortunately, what we had seen distressingly little sign of is any indication on Black's part that he had ever admitted, even to himself, that:

- 1 Snape could have been killed. And Remus would probably have been executed or sent to Azkaban for it. Dumbledore and the staff members who had facilitated Remus's attendance at the school might have been removed from their positions, or at the very least extremely publicly embarrassed. At the worst, considering Albus Dumbledore's other honors and offices, it might have snowballed into a change of government, right at the time that Voldemort's first rise was becoming more and more of an issue!
- 2 Snape could have been bitten — and survive. And, blasted skrewts notwithstanding, the deliberate creation of monsters is not a particularly innocent or laudable act. Certainly not when you create them from otherwise normal humans — against their will — however much you may dislike them. Would Black have been prepared to keep Snape company on nights of a full moon in the future in reparation? I doubt it. Having now met Fenrir Greyback, this possible outcome shows Black up in an even worse light.
- 3 That if Severus Snape, suspected practitioner of the Dark Arts, really did come to Hogwarts knowing more curses than half the 7th years, (and post-HBP we now know that if he didn't show up knowing more of them, he may have known a few different ones — having invented them himself) and Black was aware of this; mightn't it have been reasonable for him to consider that by the end

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of his 5th year Severus Snape just might possibly have managed to *kill* Remus Lupin? And he probably would have walked free. Because I am not convinced that using an unforgivable curse on a werewolf in wolf form entails the same legal penalties as using it against a *human*.

And, right up to the end of his life, Black still doesn't seem to *realize* this?

What is more, according to every indication that we had ever been given, according to Harry Potter's reading of the situation, he seems to have set this stunt up with no warning whatsoever to Remus!

It seems small wonder that, after the fact, Remus, reluctantly, believed him capable of betraying the Potters. After all, Black had certainly betrayed *him*. Not for fortune or glory, or by giving in to outside pressure, but, to all appearances, for a *joke*. I'd say that young Mr. Black seems to have managed to earn himself some seriously bad Karma over the first 20 or so years of his life. And it doesn't sound like he ever learned his lesson, either.

If, in fact, that is what happened. Which by this time I flatly no longer believe at all.

Although, before we move on, a remarkably valid point made, lo, these many years ago, by one fanfic author — probably KazVL — does make a degree of sense. One does not get much of a chance to *mature* in Azkaban. And he wasn't more than 22 when he was sent there.



Well, in any event, that was my original starting point when

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trying to figure out what was going on and to try to make sense of it. And this was still largely my adjusted starting point even after the revelations of OotP and HBP. Bringing us up to around 2006.

And, now, while we are at it, it may be time to take a closer look at, and try to extrapolate just how the episode actually played out. I didn't get into that particular end of the equation until quite late in the game, but having finally got off the fence on several other issues, our little halcyon before the last book came out seemed the last, best time to finally do it

Nothing Rowling gave us in Book 7 absolutely contradicts this reading, either. But I'm going to have to admit that I am no longer convinced that it went off this way myself. I've had any number of second thoughts since 2006.

I had a nudge in putting together this iteration. An e-mail from a correspondent who was trying to work the sequence out, for her own purposes kicked off this particular exercise by asking me my opinion as to why James Potter had run out into the tunnel to intercept Snape without closing the door into the Shack behind him?

The first thing that hit me once I turned my attention to the problem and reread the relevant sequences, was that the whole business turns out to be *much* more complex than it first appears. Back in PoA Rowling turned out to have thrown us *another* nasty curve.

First off; there was no door for James to close.

Yes, that's right. There is *no door* into the tunnel from the shack, no more than there is a door on the forest end. Harry and Hermione did not go through a door to get into the shack.

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They did not appear to get there through a normal, human-sized doorway either. They went through a “small opening” directly into the house. There are internal walls and doors inside the building itself, but the tunnel has no door. The tunnel dumps you directly into a ground-floor (or underground floor) room.

Those people who simply cannot accept that the School’s security measures could have possibly been that lax, contend that this only indicates that there is no door by the time that Harry crawled through that tunnel in 1994. But the definite absence of a door in ’94, is absolutely no indication of there having originally *been* a door in ’75 or ’76. I say that “no door” suggests a good deal more strongly that there was No Door.

Which is totally inadequate security for the situation from the get-go, at least from the school’s end of the equation!

Or, it is possible, even likely, that there had originally been a trapdoor. One which the kids did not take notice of since it was left open, lying flat on the floor next to the opening. Or, quite possibly that by the time they got there it was either broken or unsafe. Which could explain why by DHs some four years later, the opening was being blocked by a crate.

Nevertheless, even if you can depend on the afflicted child complying to an honor system. Even if they have the sense and decency to go into an internal room and close *that* door, before they transform. If they are late getting into the Shack, it falls apart right there, even if they don’t have 3 other little scofflaws to urge them to come out and play in the moonlight with them.

Of course the security measures aren’t *completely* useless. It isn’t exactly without risk to get out of the tunnel even in animal form. The Willow, unlike a werewolf, will attack anything that

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moves. Animals just as readily as humans. And an unmedicated werewolf isn’t really in his right mind, and may not remember about needing to press a knot on (the *outside* of!) the tree trunk to make it hold still. Or be able to reach the knot in order to do it.

For that matter, a reasonably-large animal like a wolf might not have been able to reach the knob to press it without having to emerge from the tunnel far enough to be attacked anyway. The whole arrangement may have been set up to assure that you could only be let out of the tunnel by someone who was already outside it (or by somebody with human hands). The gang really was lucky that one of the four was small enough to be able to dart in close enough to disarm the tree before it got them.

Second, and an even more important consideration; Neither Harry nor Hermione were particularly tall at that point of the series, and yet they both had to move through the tunnel “bent almost-double” and to try to run in a crouch all the way from the Willow; the full half-mile to a mile into Hogsmeade to the Shack. The tunnel never got any bigger. (Was it built for House Elves?) In DHs, now that Harry has his full growth he had to *crawl* through that tunnel.

A stag wouldn’t have *fit* in that tunnel.

James could have only used the tunnel while he was in human form.

So unless the Marauders had some other way out of the Shack — which we get no hint of; in Harry’s day the Shack’s windows are boarded up, and all the entrances are sealed well enough that even Fred and George never managed to break in — then James would have had to wait at the forest end of the tunnel for the others to emerge and not join them in the shack

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at all. Or not unless he joined them, and then left early enough to get out before Remus turned, and then take his Animagus form once he was in the open, and wait for them to follow.

James was the kind of boy who always wanted to be in the middle of things, but a stag just would not be able to navigate that tunnel. The idea that James would have agreed to stay in the forest as lookout until the rest of the group emerged from the tunnel certainly isn't what he would have preferred, but the role of lookout seems to have been forced on him.



So maybe we had been out in left field ever since PoA, and James *didn't* know about the trick because Sirius never said anything about it to *anyone*. James was waiting in the forest in stag form, dawdling about, keeping the entrance in sight, waiting for the others. He knew *nothing* about the plot until Snape actually showed up. He saw Snape approach the Willow and did nothing, figuring the tree could take care of itself. He may even have retreated farther into the forest to seem more in character as a stag.

But when he saw Snape actually immobilize the tree and get into the tunnel, he had to transform back into human form to intervene. Indeed, once he followed Snape in and yelled "Stop!" Snape would have scrambled farther in, and James had to chase him. He didn't catch him until they were nearly at the shack itself. James might not have learned about the rest of the stunt until later.

Which means that the situation in that tunnel was *extremely* dangerous. James couldn't transform in the tunnel. There isn't room. He had to remain human to get Snape out of there. While

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Remus was the perfect size to run down that tunnel like the Hogwarts Express if Sirius couldn't hold him back.

And whatever Sirius's intentions were for Snape, he *had* to keep Remus from getting into the tunnel in order to protect James. And as a rat, Peter wouldn't have been a lot of help. And no one could fault Peter for staying in rat form under those conditions.

As to the possibility of Snape catching sight of the dog as well as the wolf, I'm really not at all sure he would have. The windows were probably boarded then, too, so the moonlight wasn't streaming in, and no one was in human form to be performing Lumos but Snape himself, and possibly James, and they were both out in the tunnel, on the other side of the "small opening."

I suspect Snape heard the wolf more than he saw it (one howl is all that it would have taken to verify his suspicions). He saw the gleam of eyes and teeth, turned and bolted back the way he came. He certainly wouldn't have stuck around to try to tell whether it was only one animal yelping and snarling, or two.

Sirius apparently did manage to tackle Remus in time to keep him from getting out into the tunnel. And, Remus says that while he had company he was a little more human in his thoughts, even transformed. Once Snape and James were out of sight and scent, he might have not put up a fight against being confined to the shack that month (may have retreated to the upper floor so they knew he understood?), and Peter and Sirius were then able to run out the tunnel, leaving the Willow to stand guard on Remus as it was designed.

So, with this much in mind, my original take on the sequence — in this iteration — was that:

- 1 Black somehow fed Snape the information on how to

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get into the tunnel. The information could have been planted or “blurted,” unwittingly, unintentionally, or deliberately, intending anything from mischief, to actual murder. Snape was determined to follow up on it

- 2 Madam Pomfrey escorts Lupin to the Willow and sees him off down the tunnel.
- 3 Sirius and Peter get into the tunnel to join Remus in the Shack as usual. James either joins them, then leaves, or remains in the forest in Animagus form as lookout.
- 4 Snape follows them (and James) out of the castle, but is too late to see them transform. He disarms the Willow and enters the tunnel.
- 5 James resumes human form and follows, calling out for Snape to stop. Snape does nothing of the sort and James has to pursue Snape all the way into Hogsmeade.
- 6 Snape is almost to the shack by the time James overtakes him. Sirius has to grapple Remus to keep him from getting into the tunnel. Snape, who is right outside, the shack, catches a glimpse of Remus by his own wand’s light. He may catch a glimpse of Padfoot as well, but the light is poor, it is a “small opening,” Padfoot is a black dog, in the dark, and Snape, being occupied with the scuffle with James may not realize that there is more than one animal in the shack.

Once he realizes there is a werewolf in that shack he stops fighting and runs (doubled-over) back to Hogwarts, as does James, since he cannot transform in the tunnel and cannot return to the shack in human form.



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- 7 Once back on Hogwarts grounds Snape is off to the Headmaster’s office howling bloody blue murder for their expulsion. James somehow managed to fend off the worst of the episode with some “likely story” about how sure the 3 knew how to get into the tunnel, but hadn’t done so themselves, and that Sirius must have said something to give Snape the idea of how to get in by accident. He was skating on thin ice because he had been caught dead to rights by being out of bounds and playing fast and loose with Dumbledore’s (inadequate) security measures. On the other hand, what are the odds that the 4 of them *weren’t* using the shack as a secret clubhouse during the rest of the month, and Albus realized it?
- 8 Meanwhile, Remus retreated to the upper story of the Shack and Sirius and Peter left and followed James as quickly as they could.

After all, Albus would have wanted to speak to them as well — Sirius in particular, and it would have looked highly suspicious if they couldn’t be found. We do know that somehow they all managed to hoodwink the Headmaster and their Animagus cover remained unblown. Nor did Snape discover as much while they were all in school.

When questioned, Sirius might have tried to brazen it out by passing it off as a joke, that he intended to give Snape the fright of his life. James hadn’t a lot of choice but to play along with that interpretation, and Sirius was a good enough friend to have insisted that James knew nothing of it.

We still have a bit of a problem, however, since Sirius does



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make his claim to Harry that he was sure that he and James could keep Remus under control. But if he told Snape how to get into the tunnel, and the stag couldn't fit into the tunnel, then Sirius must have *known* that he wouldn't have had James's help at the shack.

Which may be a strong hint that we're just not quite *there*, ye.



Well, ignoring that maybe-hint, it certainly plays. But I no longer believe it. *Some* of it is probably correct. The stag *wouldn't* have fit in the tunnel, and there is *still* no door from the tunnel to the shack.

But I am no longer convinced that James didn't know anything about it.

Mind you I still have way too hard a time swallowing the idea that it was all a conspiracy to murder Severus Snape. But although Snape may have been wrong about the Marauder's *intentions*, I no longer believe he was the least bit wrong in his claim that James Potter was in on it up to his neck.

And so was Remus Lupin.

So what changed?

The timing. And it was Rowling who insisted on that.

Yes. That's right. I've finally managed to process at least some of the indigestible brick that Rowling dropped on us when she set the timing of the werewolf caper *before* of that of the Pensieve junket.



I do have to admit to having found myself completely baf-



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fled as to what Rowling thought she was going to accomplish by placing the werewolf caper before the Pensieve junket. If she had wanted to try to preserve any sort of good-will toward any of the participants, she'd have done better to have simply not have referred to it at all. She certainly didn't use the reference for anything *constructive*. Certainly not to openly give us anything worth having that was of approximate value to what she summarily disallowed by it.

On the surface, it's obvious why she did it of course. She intended to make it absolutely clear to every reader that Lily Evans was more of a user than a friend, and that she never had a kind word to say to Severus Snape after he had publicly called her a mudblood. (He might have been better off calling her a cunt. That, unlike her parentage, was something that reflected only upon her, herself, and her behavior.)

It isn't nearly so obvious that Rowling truly intended to so harshly clarify just what such behavior at such a time says about James Potter. But maybe we ought to reconsider it.

Of course we cannot count it out. Rowling has made a couple of statements post-release that strongly suggest that she is anything but unaware that, as written, the Weasley twins come across as cruel, and James comes across as a lying young brute.

But we cannot count on that, either. Rowling has a dreary track record of only showing open disapproval of bullies inside the story when they happen to oppose Harry. Any bully who supports him has her (apparently) full approval.

All of which says nothing whatsoever to resolve the internal contradiction she has now inserted by first having Lupin and Black claiming that the staff managed to hush up the whole



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thing, Dumbledore forcing a vow of silence regarding the incident from Snape — and then to show Lily *nagging* Snape for his “ingratitude” over James having saved his life, afterwards. What were they doing, boasting of it in the common room? For the record; I am absolutely convinced that James made very certain that Lily learned about his having saved her ugly puppy in order to impress her, and put her under some form of obligation. He clearly had designs to turn the whole episode to his benefit in aid of his courtship.

And when he couldn't bring it about over the course of the rest of the year, he tried to force the issue at the end of it.

And for that matter where does Lily actually fit into the equation now that we know that she wasn't just some random girl off on the periphery who decided to mix in, but one of the central motivating factors involved in the whole disgusting business.

I'm not sure that we aren't supposed to conclude that after what we witnessed in DHs that “not-so-saintly-Lily” just plain *didn't* really deserve anything better than a smarmy, useless, grinning lout like James Potter.

So let's all go back to the drawing board. Again.



Given that it took the Marauders “the better part of three years” to learn how become Animagi without adult guidance, the process isn't necessarily easy. Or maybe the process just isn't *obvious* and they couldn't get hold of the proper resources to figure it out even with James's cloak for sneaking into the Restricted Section. (There is no canon evidence that the Marauders ever found the Room of Requirement — in any of its

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iterations — and so never had access to any of the information that might have been suppressed and hidden there.)

Or just maybe Rowling is simply making up a few more sweeping, “dramatic” statements that don't really add up to anything of substance. Let's look at this issue a little more closely.

We know of exactly one registered Animagus who demonstrates this skill in class, but she does not teach the skill to the Hogwarts students (that we know of). In canon, the whole issue was referred to in passing in one class and never comes up again. Or at least not in the course of the formal education of the students. The whole purpose of this was set up so that the readers would be aware of the skill when it came back to bite us later.

According to Remus, the Ministry allegedly tries to keep an eye on people attempting the study of becoming Animagi because it can go horribly wrong. This Ministry oversight doesn't really sound like it's particularly effective since we know of at least four Animagi who were not registered at all, to only one who is. So are we supposed to understand that one is *supposed* to register with the Ministry when one decides to *try* to become an Animagus under their guidance/sponsorship, and the record becomes public if/when you succeed? Does the Ministry watch over you as you attempt it, and undo botched transformations like they do splinching? I mean, this reading does at least make a *degree* of sense, but we do not know whether or not it is actually the case. So just what is Rowling trying to get across to us here? I'm not convinced that she wasn't just trying to be dramatic and that it doesn't actually mean anything at all.

Of course, just because *Harry* never heard of Animagi before

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they were mentioned in McGonagall's class doesn't mean that a child raised inside the wizarding world never would, but we don't know that for sure (Babbity-Rabbity notwithstanding). We are told that it took the Marauders most of three years to manage it, and that they finally had all three managed it by some time in 5th year. They evidently did not take *all* of first year to figure out the cause of Lupin's monthly absences, but it might have taken them a while to decide what, if anything they could do about it. They may have started trying to become Animagi at some point in 2nd year after doing some research over the summer. But if Lupin is being mush-mouthed again and they didn't manage until quite late in 5th year, they may have only started the project at the beginning of 3rd year, after McGonagall demonstrated the possibility of it in her first class of the year, just as she did in Harry's time.

Conversely, they could have started in 2nd year, and worked on it over 3rd and 4th, finally succeeding early in the Autumn term of 5th.

I think we might also need to rethink some of our older data and consider a reading that Remus's reminisces about the days of the Marauders' "wandering with werewolves" as being the times that his transformations became "not only bearable, but the best times of my life" did not begin to take place until *after* the business with Snape had had time to blow over, and there would be no danger of his following them outside, and either discovering, or telling anyone that they were letting Remus out of the Shack.

And, just in case it blew past us, it is also now perfectly obvious to me that Snape knew *exactly* what he was going to find

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at the end of that tunnel. (Although I really do think he might have expected there to be a *door*.) If he had just wanted to find out where the tunnel went, he could have disabled the tree and gone to investigate any other day of the month. No. He was there to *prove his theory*. Which was indeed correct.

All of which raises the likelihood that Snape is also absolutely correct in his accusation that the whole lot of them WERE in on the "trick."

But I say he's still wrong about it being a murder attempt. On their side, that would have just been too big a risk for too little gain. I think it was *always* planned that James would pull a "rescue." That was an inherent component of the whole conspiracy.

Like I say, I think I may have finally figured it out.



I'm not the only one to do so, either. A discussion sprung up regarding this subject on one of the boards that I used to look in on from time to time. It sprung up when I was swamped, so I didn't really have the time to attend to it very closely. I skimmed a couple of Digests, and burrowed into other things elsewhere. But something from it has to have stuck because when a comment in another discussion somewhere else nudged me, it came bubbling right up to the top.

I later embarrassed myself by mentioning my conclusions in the original forum, only to have it pointed out that they'd already discussed that and come to the same conclusion some weeks earlier, thanks.

Oh. Well.

But, in any case, let us remind ourselves; just what is that

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first axiom to which any theorist needs to apply to anything that they run across in the Potterverse, again? All together now: "*What happened, is what was MEANT to happen.*"

So, okay, just what actually *happened* as a result of the werewolf caper?

Riiiiight.



That was no murder attempt. It wasn't an irresponsible prank on Sirius's part, either. The whole point of the werewolf caper was to *shut Snape's mouth*. They knew they couldn't do that on their own, so they had to bring in the heavy artillery. Which is to say, the Hogwarts staff.

The Marauders already knew that Snape had figured out that Lupin was a werewolf.

And just how did they know that?

Well, *duh*. Little Miss Lily had been flapping her jaws again.

Nor would this have been the first time we saw Lily jumping into a situation to pop off about what she had found out about somebody, and throwing it in their face. And from our observations between Lily and Petunia on Platform 9¾, any blame incurred by that popping off was always her associates' fault when she discovered that this performance did not result in general admiration.

She may have been pretty, and she may have been clever, but post DHs, we don't really get any kind of an indication that she was any good at keeping a confidence *confidential*, do we? That would have denied her too many opportunities to show off. And we also learned in passing from that nagging session

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between her and Snape — which took place some time *before* the OWLs — that Snape had already discussed his suspicions with Lily *before* he learned the truth and had been forbidden to speak of the matter further; not even to inform her that he was right.

Perhaps with this in mind one ought to re-examine that Pensieve junket, keeping in mind the fact that — as we *now* know — James initiated that performance from what he considered to be the rock-solid position of being the proven hero of the secret confrontation in that tunnel. His private rescue of Snape had probably been intended — at least in part — to put Lily in the position of being under obligation to him, and he was now intending to call in the favor and make his reward a matter of public record. Evidently Tom Riddle wasn't the only bully in this series who liked to take trophies.

In fact, by that point James Potter's belief that she owed him something, on top of however long it had now been of her girlfriends urging her to shed that loser of a Slytherin, may have had her already resenting Snape's existence. Leading to her blaming him for not utterly capitulating to her every demand, some of which were, at the very least, unmeetable.

Snape derailed the whole performance by calling Lily a mudblood and she retaliated by disowning any sense of obligation to *either* of them. And she didn't forgive either of them for over a year. I don't think she was willing to reconsider James until he lost both his parents and she felt sorry for him. She never seems to have really forgiven Snape at all.



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At which point we all need a salutary reminder that the secrets which were being kept were *not* Remus Lupin's. This is where a lot of theorists and fanfic authors trip over their own feet because they forget to apply the meta.

Yeah, sure, Lupin was a werewolf, and he'd be happy if as few people were aware of it as possible. But the fact that a werewolf was attending classes at Hogwarts, and sleeping in the Gryffindor dormitory 25–26 days a month was hardly *Lupin's* secret. Or the Marauders' secret, *either*.

That was *Albus's* secret.

Oh, sure, he probably was resigned to the fact that the boy's dorm mates were likely to figure it out at some point during their time at Hogwarts. And they probably did so rather earlier than he expected them to, or found convenient. He also probably had a contingency plan if any of them came to him or to McGonagall with concerns. He may even have had a "worst case scenario" ready in case one of them blurted to their parents (in retrospect one has to seriously wonder whether Umbridge's mail ward in OotP was the first time that sort of thing had been imposed). When the whole group closed ranks around the young unfortunate, he breathed a sigh of relief and carefully distanced himself from them, and the whole situation.

Which, when you stop and think about it, **could** explain at least some of the laxness in high places, regarding the Marauder's activities. The *last* thing Albus wanted to do was draw any attention to his own involvement regarding *any* of them.

Snape's mistake, of course, is that he lost track of just whose secrets he was messing with. He thought he was uncovering one of the *Marauders'* secrets.



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As if.

And I really don't think that Albus takes well to people poking their noses into his secrets. And much of the harshness regarding his dealing with the intrusion was probably because of that.

Of course it was an easy mistake for Snape to make. It had been the four of them against him (and Lily) ever since their first trip on the Hogwarts Express. And precious little the Hogwarts staff seems to have done to put a damper on it. Of course he assumed that the Marauders were keeping secrets. And of course they were. But this one wasn't *their* secret.

The Marauders knew that the school wanted the fact that there was a werewolf attending classes kept under wraps. The Headmaster and Poppy Pomfrey obviously knew, and they were hushing it up. Minerva probably knew and was also hushing it up. The whole staff could have been engaged in hushing it up. And well before 5th year, the Marauders may have already been given a private talking to and forbidden to speak about it except among themselves once it was clear that they knew. They probably suspected that anyone who found out about it would also be forcibly silenced and kept from spreading it around.

(One suddenly wonders once again about the peculiar way that none of the staff — Minerva, Filius, and Hagrid — in the 3 Broomsticks eavesdropping scene in PoA even mentioned Remus's name. Could they *still* be under orders not to speak of him or his lycanthropy in the presence of outsiders, such as Fudge and Rosemerta? For that matter did Fudge or Rosemerta even know that Lupin was a werewolf at that point?)

The Marauders had a great deal invested in getting Snape thoroughly out of the equation before they took matters to



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the next level and started joining their furry little friend in his transformations and romping around the school grounds, the forest, and the village. I now believe that the whole werewolf caper may have been in the nature of a preemptive strike.

The Marauders knew (from Lily) that Snape was poking about and suspicious. But they certainly hadn't the authority to make him shut up if he managed to stumble across the truth. Not if it was only them. Not if it was only their word against his. Only the staff could do that.

So, obviously, the thing to do was to make sure that the staff *knew* that Snape had stumbled across the truth. In a private enough manner that the staff could be trusted to shut him up.

And of course once the staff had done that, he would also be much less likely to keep poking about after them and seeing what else they were up to, wouldn't he? Not once he knew he'd already figured out what they were hiding. Nor would he be out on the grounds during full moon once he was sure of that truth either.

They probably were already in the habit of joining Lupin in the shack before the "prank," but I now think they didn't start "wandering with werewolves" out in the open until after the threat of Snape ever coming across them while they did so had been removed.



So the relevant timeline on this issue may actually go:

- 1 Test whether other animals really were safe if confined overnight with a werewolf.

Leading me to suspect that an early stage of this

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test cycle may have been to steal some of the other students' pets and shut them in a closed room inside the Shack ahead of time to see whether other animals really were safe from Remus.

- 2 Become Animagi, and be able to do it reliably.

This didn't happen until some time in 5th year. It could have been *any* time in 5th year.

- 3 Join Remus in the Shack as Animagi at least once and prove the theory that they would be safe from him.

During this period they also probably tested to see whether the big dog or the stag had any leverage over the wolf. It seems they did. Ergo: they were now confident that they could keep Lupin under control during any outings, as well as during their private performance to an audience consisting of one Severus Snape.

- 4 Set Snape up to find out about how to disable the tree, and be rescued by one of the Marauders. And, to be caught in the act by a staff member for good measure.

James may have just drawn the long straw. Sirius the short one for being the one to let Snape know how to get past the willow. Conversely, they may simply have decided that Sirius the dog would have the best chance of keeping the wolf in the Shack and keep him from actually biting anyone, since the stag couldn't chase after the wolf if he got out into the tunnel. Besides, James had the most to gain by playing the hero.

So it was James who was to let himself be seen and to drag Snape out of the tunnel once he'd glimpsed the wolf. James's presence would make it clear that they all knew



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that Snape now knew. There was no chance of Snape's sneaking off and pretending that he'd been nowhere near the tunnel that night. Also, James's presence might lessen the chance that Snape would *attack* the wolf.

Plus, it's got to impress Lily to know that James has rescued her ugly puppy from meddling in what he ought to keep his overly large nose out of.

- 5 Run the prank and get Snape solidly under orders to keep his mouth shut. For good measure, James can even spin the situation into a story that he had been protecting the staff's secrets. And Sirius had merely been indiscreet about the *tree*, not about Lupin.

- 6 We're all going to get detentions for being out of bounds. Serve them without complaint.

For that matter, Peter's part in the show may have been to draw Hagrid (or his dog) out of his hut at the proper time so that *he* would be the one to catch James and Severus at the willow and haul them off to the Headmaster, so there would be *no* chance of Snape sneaking off without being forced to keep quiet on the subject.

Actually, when you stop and think about it, Peter was probably there at the willow, in rat form — to make sure that James could drag Severus out of the tunnel without interference from the tree. James or Severus might not necessarily have been able to reach the knot in the trunk from inside. (Although on second thought, they probably could. Pomfrey escorted Remus to the Willow, she may not have needed to let him out.)



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And, If we can accept that reading; as of November 2016, a further wrinkle very much belatedly occurred to me (or, rather, surfaced from the subconscious related to an email discussion back in something like 2009 with the redoubtable Swythv): we know that the Marauders set Snape up. We've concluded that what they were after is exactly what they got — to shut his mouth, and scare him off before they started their monthly "wanderings with werewolves" outings. We have developed a strong suspicion that the cover story of Sirius setting Snape up without anyone else's knowledge, and James pulling all their chestnuts out of the fire when he found out, was exactly that; a cover story. One which the survivors were still sticking to 20 years later. Even after Albus had become aware that three of the four had been illegal Animagi. (Admittedly, no one has ever asked Peter his version of the incident. Somehow, no one ever thinks to ask Peter anything.)

Well, y'know; wizards clearly have a taste for drama, and unannounced amateur theatricals are hardly unknown among adolescents. Plus, the Marauders were all perfectly aware that if anything went wrong, there would be serious consequences for all of them, and particularly for Remus. Which opens up at least one more possibility for theorizing — and fanfic — purposes, anyway. There is never likely to be anything in canon to either support or contradict it. But it makes a viable plot bunny.

What if the four of them were all not quite *that* irresponsible? Plus, I rather doubt that they were that enthralled by the level of risk that James would be taking if Remus got into that tunnel



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— which was rather too small for James to turn into Prongs in if anything went wrong.

Still, it is *dark* in that tunnel.

If the four of them were going to set up an elaborate stunt to eliminate a security risk, mightn't they have been *just* bright enough to build in at least *some* degree of safeguard? For themselves, even if not for Snape?

After all. We don't know what *kind* of dog Sirius turns into. Just that he's large, and black, and shaggy. And "shaggy" doesn't necessarily mean an exceptionally long coat. A wolf can have a fairly heavy coat. The real issue is what do his ears look like, and that we can't be certain of. He is frequently mistaken for a Grim. But "Grim" is not a recognized breed of dog. Most spectral dogs in folklore are identified as hounds, but in this case, we don't know how closely Rowling is adhering to folklore. Rowling has rather carefully avoided identifying Padfoot as any definite breed of dog, so he would probably have had a fairly generic configuration for a dog, although a large one, and, after all, *all dogs* descend from wolves.

If he had floppy ears, then this is not going to fly. BUT if Padfoot has erect ears, there is a fighting chance that he might very well pass for a wolf in the dark. Are you following me?

For that matter, does 3rd-party Transfiguration even *work* on Animagi when in their animal forms? Changing the shape of an Animagus dog's ears certainly ought not to offer any more insurmountable problem than changing the shape of a human's ears (which is certainly doable, given all the folktales of people ending up with asses ears). On the other hand, Ron's spell to turn Scabbers yellow was a dismal failure. But, then, we don't



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know whether that was even a legitimate spell. (I mean, really, how many spells in any of the kids' classes entailed reciting what was basically a nursery rhyme?) It would be perfectly in character for the twins to have set Ron up with a bogus spell.

Now, Snape is absolutely convinced that he saw Remus in wolf form in that tunnel. But in PoA canon — the book, that is, NOT the film — Snape was still unconscious, or at least had his eyes closed, when Remus actually turned, and Sirius drove Remus off into the forest before Snape woke up. So there is no certainty that Snape ever actually saw Remus in his wolf form other than whatever he glimpsed in the tunnel back in his 5th year. Nor that he ever saw Padfoot, apart from maybe a glimpse of the alleged Grim, in the distance, until Albus had him brought into the hospital wing at the end of GoF. I seriously doubt that Snape would have ever gone to Remus's office in Year 3 to check, and be sure that the wolfsbane potion had him properly neutralized. He trusts his own skill as a brewer. But he still would have probably avoided that whole corridor on full moon nights.

We do know that he had seen Padfoot *since* Sirius escaped Hogwarts, some dozen years later, but there are no wolves in the wild in Britain. He saw a large dog, indoors in a lighted room, and there was no helpful James to make possible adjustments to the dog's appearance via transfiguration, either. Snape isn't making any connection between what he sees in GoF and what he glimpsed in a tunnel, briefly, some 20 years earlier.

Besides, it clearly never occurred to any of the perps that it might be in their interest to let Snape know that he'd been hoodwinked into believing a dog was a wolf, 20 years after the fact. (Given the potential for mockery, I'm surprised it didn't,



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but, then, they had other concerns by that time.)



So, let's try this again. Remus, in wolf form, is barricaded inside the shack. They've been very careful about that this month. He isn't going to get out. But he can smell humans, and is kicking up all kinds of a fuss trying to get at them. You can probably hear him quite a long way down that tunnel.

In the tunnel, you have Padfoot, *pretending* to be Remus, waiting for the glow of Snape's Lumos to spring out of the gloom, snarling, and scare him out of a year's growth.

With James lurking outside the entrance, possibly as Prongs, to see Snape enter the tunnel and follow him in.

And, very likely, Peter waiting to run off and alert Hagrid or a professor, so they can get Snape leaned on by someone in authority as they ring down the curtain on the whole performance.

The only one in any real physical danger is Padfoot — if Snape decides to go on the offensive instead of running, but a good part of James's role is to try to keep Snape from doing that, in the guise of assuring Snape's "rescue."

Somewhat after the fact, Albus would be able to determine that Remus was indeed secured in the shack, and there was no danger to anyone who kept away from it. Which would have gone some way in explaining his confidence that his security system was sound, and that there was more to be concerned with the security risk that Snape presented than Sirius's irresponsibility in nearly blowing everyone's cover.

That would also go some way in explaining Sirius's general

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attitude that it was all "no big deal" some 20 years later when his recollection of the incident could be understandably hazy after over a decade in Azkaban. His callousness on that point still disturbs nearly all readers — and it certainly seems more productive to work out a plausible reason for why he might feel that Snape never was actually in any danger, than to build up a stack of maybe-evidence for how Snape was so horrible that he really did deserve that.

And; do we know anything for certain of what Albus was actually *told*? And, for that matter, just what would Snape have said himself — in the moment — and what would he have kept silent about in order to lessen his own consequences with the school authorities. He may have had Slughorn's favor (perhaps), and was a good student — but he was in nowhere near as strong a position as the Gryffindors, who obviously were already effectively entrusted with the secret of why Lupin disappeared for a couple of nights every few weeks. And he was seriously, but *seriously*, out of bounds that night. The Marauders did have him dead to rights for spying on them.

From all the accounts 20 years later, Snape had clearly been caught by James in that tunnel. But would he have admitted to having actually been IN the tunnel at the time, if the Marauders didn't make an issue of it? I now suspect quite possibly not.

After all, it wasn't in the *Marauders'* interest to let Albus know that just about anyone could get into that tunnel. Sirius might have admitted to having let the cat out of the bag about how one gets into the tunnel while they were still in school to *Harry*, but we don't absolutely know that he said as much at the time. He well may have, but they were all in school for another

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two years, and that information may have leaked later. That there were no heavy consequences for *anyone* over the incident, strongly suggests that rather a lot of "spin" was deployed.

And, no. Being forced to take a vow not to tell anyone about there being a werewolf attending Hogwarts is not a heavy consequence. Snape got off *just* as lightly as Sirius did. The Marauders basically traded off the admission that Remus was a werewolf — which they knew Snape had already figured out — for his silence on the subject, and as a bonus gave him such a disgust of the whole business that he would probably not go stalking them thereafter. Leaving the way clear for them to smuggle Remus out of the shack, and go frolicking in the woods during the full moon.

Plus, it seems fairly evident to me now that neither Snape *nor* James were actually caught *in* the tunnel by the school authorities. The Marauders — who, after all, set this whole performance up — probably jumped in with a story that they had caught Snape at the Willow *before* he got into the tunnel, and had seen Remus through the entrance.

Which was effectively offering Snape an easy out. They had him dead to rights for spying, but they were willing to let him off on whatever charge of reckless endangerment might be invoked IF he was willing to take it. Which would have made Snape himself complicit in the cover-up.

And that was just the finishing touch to the whole setup. If he hadn't hated them before he certainly would have over that. And any suggestion of life debts for having "saved" him from going into the tunnel would have just infuriated him further.

And it might have made them all far more confident about

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publicly hazing him at the end of the year.



In all fairness, I feel I ought now to at least fill everyone in on Swythyv's original version, which I *strongly* suspect that my own was a much belated spinoff of. Hers is nowhere near as benign.

And, in a backhanded sort of way, hers does reflect somewhat well on James. What had been planned was a bit crueler than James was prepared to contenance. In addition, he could also see that it also had a lot of potential to have unforeseen consequences that could seriously impede their future activities.

It was a setup all right. But in this version, Sirius *was* working alone on it. Remus knew nothing about it, and Peter probably didn't either. One can, after all, get in under the Willow by levitating a stick to poke the knot. Sirius didn't actually *need* Peter. And James only knew about it because Sirius had brought up the possibility of his splendid "prank" as a laugh at some point. And at the time, James probably *had* laughed.

It was only that James, following a hunch — probably because he couldn't *find* Sirius that evening — went to check the matter out, and derailed it.

Remus was safely in the shack, all right. And Padfoot was in the tunnel, waiting for Snape.

Waiting to give him a fright, *and* a nip. And watch him stew for a month, agonizing over whether he was going to turn, next full moon.

I'm sure that to a couple of young bullies shooting off their mouths that prospect would have been hilarious. Fortunately, James had just enough common sense to realize that to deploy

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it would entail a strong likelihood of Madam Pomfrey getting involved. She would know a cursed bite from an ordinary one.

And, in any event, that would have all kinds of potential for spinning out of their control if Snape had tried to cover the matter up, healed himself, and then put himself in harm's way by making his way to where werewolves were suspected of lurking, in order to turn the following month (which might have been during the summer break). Or, knowing that special arrangements had been made for Lupin, had chosen to pursue the matter of requesting that the same arrangements be made for *him*, and been sent off to the shack *with* Lupin.

No. Just too many variables for a bunch of kids to be able to anticipate.

So James followed a hunch and averted disaster. Barely.



And, now that we come right down to it; as I have stated elsewhere, I think that for years after PoA was released the fans had been skating right past what really went down with the werewolf caper — from Dumbledore's point of view.

And that had the potential to get really, *really* nasty.

It also tended to slip past readers that Dumbledore even *had* a point of view. Which there really isn't a lot of excuse for, because, after all, it was Dumbledore who set the whole situation up in the first place. The unanswered (and, worse, unasked) question has always been; What did Albus think he was doing?

Indeed, given what we have now been shown of Albus's reluctance to be put in a position of responsibility for *anyone* else's welfare you seriously wonder what prevailed upon him to have

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undertaken such a thing even the once. And it is also clear that even though the matter was successfully hushed up, the very fact that a cover-up was required must have derailed whatever plans Albus had drafted out for the experiment, because nothing whatsoever actually *came* of it, apart from one educated werewolf under obligation to Albus.

It took us all far too long before people started to wonder just what was at stake in this experiment for Albus. No one has ever offered any convincing reason for why Albus would have gone out on a limb for the Lupins' kid. We're completely lacking any kind of a reason or motive. Of course, given the debacle that it turned into, it's easy enough to see why he wouldn't have done it again for any *other* werewolf kid. Once was quite enough, and I suspect that he heartily regretted it afterwards, although he'd never have come out and admitted as much.

But then we were handed the whole werewolf backstory early enough in the series that no one particularly cared about *why*, at the time. The big reveal in the shack needed a backstory, and what we got served the purpose beautifully.

But even just a couple of books farther on you find yourself beginning to go; "Wait a moment... " and once the 7th book is out and we all get to air the Dumbledores' dirty laundry, you're stuck wondering; "What was he trying to *accomplish*?" Because DHs' Albus would have definitely have to have had a *reason* for anything he put himself out on somebody else's account for. And bringing a werewolf to Hogwarts to be educated alongside the rest of the WW's kids, entirely on his own say-so, is putting himself out on a limb to a degree that seems totally mystifying.

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This particular issue does also seem to link into the viewpoint that the younger fans somehow got hold of, and continue to believe that Dumbledore irrationally favors Gryffindors, just for being Gryffindors. They got that idea very early in the series. But, looked at rationally, there is absolutely no convincing evidence to confirm that reading. Nevertheless that reading continues right up to the present day.

I'll admit there's more to support that notion than there was for the usual baggage loaded onto the original fanon-issue interpretation of Snape-Loved-Lily, but I still think the fans are taking Albus's alleged favoritism for Gryffindors (or for the Marauders in particular, which is a good deal worse) way farther than they ought to be. And the reasons they came to that conclusion in the first place are certainly open to other interpretations.

Absolutely the **ONLY** grounds we have in canon for Albus Dumbledore's alleged favoritism for the Marauders, or for Gryffindors in general are;

- 1 He kept giving the house Cup to the Gryffs to impress Harry, and;
- 2 He did not expel Black for his part in the werewolf caper.

Well, at the end of OotP Albus openly *admitted* that first charge. He comes right out and *tells* Harry that his favoritism was to Harry *personally*. NOT to Gryffindor House in general.

Before Harry walked in the door it seems to have been the **SLYTHERINS** who appear to have been the favored House, assuming there even *was* a favored House, (for a string of seven years straight the Slyths had taken the Cup) and I am no longer

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convinced that it was because Snape was cheating over House points. I think Albus might once have wanted the Slytherins to not feel they had any reason to follow their parents' lead in grouching about Albus being Headmaster. For all that he was on the board, Lucius Malfoy may have met with quite some degree of resistance for his contention that Dumbledore was the worst thing to have ever happened to Hogwarts. At least before the end of Harry's first year.

And, as for that second charge, Albus just plain couldn't *afford* to expel Black.

He'd have had to give people a *reason* for it.

Between them, the Marauders, and Snape, had him over a barrel. This was the point that Albus nearly lost his job and almost brought his whole "government" tumbling down.

Right when Riddle was on the rise, too.

Which... could be a bit of a hint. Did the fact that Albus was undertaking to secretly educate a werewolf have anything whatsoever to do with Tom Riddle? It certainly doesn't read like that to me.

Maybe we've all bought into the assumption that Riddle was the sum total of everything the wizarding world was ever concerned about a bit too heavily. Tom Riddle wasn't their only problem, by a long shot. At least not right then.

The question however remains; why *Lupin*?

Oh sure, a number of fanfic authors have postulated that Albus was somehow beholden to Lupin's parents. But that just reads as another retcon, and we certainly don't need another one of those.

What we need is something that exists in canon, that could

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serve as a reason for why Albus would have arbitrarily drafted out some grand experiment of educating a young werewolf. Why? Although...

Given what we have since been told regarding one Fenrir Greyback, and his alleged philosophy that he should turn as many children as possible, and raise packs of young werewolves, separate from wizards, as his own little empire of outcasts — which one is given to understand had become public knowledge by some time during VWI, someone could just *about* spin a kinda/sorta plausible theory that Albus wanted to publicly offer a rebuttal to Greyback's whole threat by proving that Greyback's victims could nevertheless still be educated, and become contributing members of wizarding society. Albus's influence was still riding fairly high at that point, after all. He might have been able to carry it off with a high hand.

Especially if he could present it as a *fait accompli*.

We haven't been given any truly detailed account of the progress of the beginnings of VWI, but it was quite possibly known by around 1970 that Greyback had allied with Voldemort. Ergo; to the general wizarding world, every werewolf in Britain was automatically counted as one of Voldemort's troops. I think this was a psychological advantage that Albus thought should be neutralized.

And he probably chose Lupin as his example because Lupin's parents *hadn't* simply thrown him out once he'd been infected. They were still trying to raise him themselves, and were intending to educate him at home. We don't know how common that was. Albus might not have had all that wide a selection of possible candidates for his social experiment.



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We don't know that Lupin was Greyback's first victim, either, but he seems to have been bitten fairly early on in Greyback's career, I gather it took place before the Ministry was even admitting that they were at war. And the war was only really just really ramping up by the time the Marauder cohort started Hogwarts. Voldemort seems to have rendered himself unmentionable around 1970. The Marauders started at Hogwarts in '71.

I suppose it might have made a rather nice piece of propaganda for Albus, and by extension, the Ministry, to — after the fact — reveal a perfectly civilized, educated young werewolf (an ex-Prefect, no less, Lupin may have even been Albus's original pick for Head Boy), with devoted friends from good families and a family of his own, who supported him, and with no desire whatsoever to run off and join a pack of outcasts, or follow Voldemort.

Even though I'd say that Albus had left the underlying issue unaddressed for rather too long. He had no way of knowing whether the war would still be waging by the time the kid finished school. But that's Albus all over, never actually do *anything* until it's arguably too late. Although, admittedly, such a presentation could have also been useful in a post-war.

But, of course, that potential coup would all depend upon the experiment being a *success*. One educated poster boy werewolf, with no dangerous consequences to anyone, that any meddling investigator would be able to dig up and smear around afterwards.

On consideration, I'm not really surprised by Albus's later willingness to throw Sirius to the Dementors and lose the key. He hadn't been able to do that when Sirius was in school. He'd have



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had to explain why, and he couldn't very well have done that without losing all of his influence, probably his job, and quite possibly have found himself sitting in a cell right next to him.

In 1981, he could do it without costing himself*anything*: To general public acclaim, as well.

No, I'm no longer wondering at all about how Dumbledore could let Barty Crouch throw Black to the Dementors for a dozen years, without a trial, and do nothing whatsoever to even try to find out what really happened in that explosion.

I am beginning to suspect that for all his impeccable good manners when referring to the man, his recognition of just how important Black had become to Harry, and his determination to publicly do justice to Black's good qualities, Albus Dumbledore may have detested Sirius Black every bit as much as Snape did. And I'm not convinced he was actually all that fond of James, either. And it may have been mutual.

Albus was pushed into a position where (so far as he was able to see it) he had to be very much obliged to James Potter for pulling those particular chestnuts out of the fire for him. And I don't really think Albus is a person who likes being under obligation to others.

We were told all the way back in Book 3 that Remus Lupin is the only juvenile lycanthrope to have ever been educated at Hogwarts as a wizard.

Now that we know about Fenrir Greyback and his intentions regarding children can you really suppose that Lupin was the only one who was ever out there?

Lupin's education was an *experiment*. Black nearly blew it sky high. Anyone investigating Lupin's attendance at Hogwarts would have been able to uncover the fact that *something* had

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been covered up, even if they might not ever be able to determine precisely what. And with investigators like Rita Skeeter underfoot, the media spin might conceivably turn out to be even be worse than the actual event.

Albus had lost his bargaining chip on the werewolf issue, and wasn't about to take the risk of attempting that again.

How many wizarding-born werewolves were lost to Greyback's packs. Their magic left untrained, their socialization warped out of any kind of affiliation with humanity thanks to "Sirius Black's trick"? Greyback wasn't out of commission for any span of 14 years the way Riddle was. How many young wizards has Greyback destroyed, that Albus could not take the risk of salvaging and enlisting as wizards — who would then be *obliged* to him — so that Voldemort might not get his claws into them?

No, the business *had* to be hushed up. The wizarding public could not be told that there was a young werewolf attending classes with their children at Hogwarts. And you just know that Albus *never* ran that plan past the Board of Governors, or the Wizengamot. Every one of those boys had to be "bought off" and their silence assured.

Lupin's silence was already assured. Pettigrew could be bought off by threat of expulsion and not punishing him for being out-of-bounds. Black could be bought off by not expelling him and only assigning him some number of detentions for a prank that could have killed a fellow student (possibly going through faded files in Filch's office and copying them).

James, well, we already know that James eventually became Head Boy. His silence might have been bought by not expelling his friend, and an appointment as Quidditch Captain. But how-

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ever obliged, it doesn't necessarily mean that Albus *liked* the boy. He already knew James was a bully, and a leader of bullies. I think Albus was all too well aware that James's habitual behavior had contributed to the situation having gone out of control the way it did.

And the boy *meddled*. That was the real sticking point. Albus Dumbledore does *not* appreciate meddlers.

Which left Snape. Who was *another* meddler. Assuring his silence was absolutely crucial.

Well, we now have every reason to suspect that under Albus Dumbledore (Mark II, as per DHs) that the whole issue was probably handled with the maximum degree of pressure and injustice.

After the fact, one really has to wonder just how much effort Albus actually put into protecting the Potters (as opposed to spouting fine-sounding platitudes). For that matter, I now wonder how much of a surprise was it for him to realize that the damn Trelawney prophecy might even apply to the Potters. And also just what kind of vibes Pettigrew was picking up from Albus's direction regarding him and his friends inside the Order to have him trying to line up protection for himself from the other team as well.



I still prefer my own version, frankly.

In that version, Albus (Mark I, as we could still interpret him up to the end of HBP) still had to get an agreement to say nothing of the matter out of young Snape, and he also had to offer the boy something in return that was of at least equal value. I believed he had offered him a promise of protection if the DEs

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came and tried to force him to cooperate with them.

He may have also offered him some personal training. That may be how Snape learned formal Legilimency and Occlumency. But even leaving that whole issue aside, the more you squint around the edges of the Harry filter, the more evident it seemed that until Harry came along Severus Snape seems to have been in a position to have functioned as Albus's protégé, for all that Rowling was determined to deny and back-pedal away from any such possibility in the final book.

But if he ever had been in such a position, it had to have started somewhere. And, really, such a relationship as that is more likely to have started while Snape was still in school than after he was out of it.

Until DHs came out, I was able to seriously consider that my statement above, about the werewolf caper having been a more life-changing incident for James Potter than it was for Severus Snape, might perhaps have been wrong. It may have been much more life-changing for Severus Snape.

In human terms, his life may have changed very much for the better.

Not that any of the Marauders were in a position to know that. Then.



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Exploring one of the continuing conundrums which has been with us from the beginning of the series.

This particular article spent over a decade in the Briar Patch collection along with other various flights of fancy. But it makes sense to finally take a somewhat more serious look at what we've got, and try to figure out what could have happened that left us with the kind of conundrum we are faced with.

Not that this comes to any more useful a conclusion than many other attempts, by many other people, of course.

And for that matter, I left the original flight of fancy untouched. Sometimes one is just bitten by the "silly" bug.



Perhaps one the sillier conventions to have grown out of the stylizations that sprung up around the classic "Golden Age" detective story — and mystery literature in general — is the one that I have dubbed the "passing parade." In the stories which employ this convention (and it really does sometimes feel like you are attending a convention) you invariably have a broad field of suspects and a multitude of clues which have been culled from their testimony, the testimony of witnesses, and physical evidence lying around at the crime scene and elsewhere, all of which point in every conceivable direction.

Ultimately, you work your way through them all to the final summing up of the mystery, with a detailed deconstruction of the events surrounding the matter under investigation by the investigating detective(s). Generally with a grand final revelation in the library. At this point, it is painstakingly proven that

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upon the day, or, more typically the night of the crime every single one of your main suspects — never fewer than three — all traipsed through the crime scene one after the other, usually never catching even the slightest glimpse of each other, making observations, seeing, speaking or quarreling with the victim and strewing clues in their wake.

The detective eventually unravels this Gordian knot and straightens out the order of events, ultimately disclosing the guilty party.

The procedure is as artificial as a puppet show, and as dated as a button hook and spats, but the device is still in use today. Even, laughably enough, in the sort of "gritty," hard-boiled, crime-in-California mystery that makes a great show of turning up its nose at the overly-mannered settings and upper-middle class pretensions of the classic British "puzzler."

Once examined, the "missing 24 hour" period between Voldemort's attack on the Potters and Harry's being left on the Dursley's doorstep has a great many of the earmarks of a classic "Passing Parade."



The ongoing debate over the events of that 24 hours has entertained the fans for years. Some are convinced that the boy was concealed at Hogwarts during this time, some are sure that he was left with the Weasleys, or alternately, the Longbottoms during this period. Others have floated the suggestion that he was in hidden locations at just about any point around the landscape.

However, if you go back and take another look at what we are directly told in canon, at the very opening of the story, the whole

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situation turns out to be much worse than we thought.

It isn't a mere 24 hours that are missing.

It's more like three days.

Yes, we all know by now that Rowling notoriously cannot count. And doesn't appear to be able to read a calendar. But what purpose would possibly have been served by being so insistent that the story opens with Vernon Dursley heading off to the office on a dull grey *Tuesday* morning, if she didn't *mean* that the story opens on a Tuesday morning?

Was she just saying "Tuesday" for effect? (ETA: by this time I am fairly convinced that spouting off for effect was *exactly* what she was doing. But for the purposes of this essay we'll continue to act as if she knew what she was talking about.)

And as we watch the action, or lack of it, over the course of the day, we have no choice but to conclude that Harry Potter was dropped off on the Dursley's doorstep after dark on a Tuesday evening.

In 1981, Halloween was on a Saturday.



Like I say, the easiest patch of course is simply, to ignore the fact that Rowling tries to say that it's all happening on a Tuesday. Since she never gave us the slightest hint for *why* it needed to be happening on a Tuesday, the statement is easy to ignore. But to come out and state that we should all be ignoring canon, right from page 1, sets a very bad precedent.

Although, now, downstream of DHs, maybe that wouldn't be the worst idea.



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Of course, even ignoring the fact that this is supposed to be happening on a Tuesday, we still have a missing gap in the timeline. A couple of books later, Hagrid appears to claim that he took baby Harry directly from Godric's Hollow to his aunt's house in Little Whinging and that he was left on their doorstep before the next morning.

Establishing that the only way in which it *could* have happened like that would have been for Minerva to have been waiting on the Dursley's wall since the morning *before* Voldemort's attack on the Potters, and that on Privet Drive, Halloween festivities evidently were canceled, for otherwise she'd have been sitting there right in the middle of them.

And it *still* would have been taking place on a *Saturday*.

By PoA we'd all become accustomed to the reading that Hagrid tends to blurt out information that would be better kept confidential, but we never got the impression that he was a liar. And, at that point in the series, if any of his statements were inaccurate, it was transparently due to his own biases. What he *did* know, he clearly knew.

However, we spent most of the whole first chapter of the first book watching Vernon Dursley have a very strange day at the office, and Minerva McGonagall sitting on the Dursley's front wall in the form of a cat.

In view of this, the problem isn't that we've got a *missing* 24 hours, it's that we've got, at the very least, an *additional* 24 hours inserted into the storyline where it has no business.



Nor is it just the raw time involved that is the problem. By

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the time that Albus meets them, neither Minerva nor Hagrid appear to have any idea of what has supposedly taken place over the course of the day that has just passed.

In Hagrid's case, there was no such day. Albus sent him off to Godric's Hollow, he met Sirius Black there, borrowed the motorcycle when Sirius couldn't convince him to hand over the baby, took the baby, and flew on the motorcycle directly to Little Whinging.

In Minerva's case it all starts getting problematic. In the first place, why is she even there? Albus wasn't *surprised* to find her there, but she wasn't there on his orders. By the time he shows up she has somehow already heard that the Potters have been attacked and murdered, but she knows nothing about the arrest of Sirius Black.

More to the point, where did she get the information which she immediately starts questioning Albus about when he shows up? She was sitting on the wall in the form of a cat all day. I doubt that everyone in the wizarding world knew about the attack on the Potters until some time the following morning at the very earliest. Indeed, if the attack had been particularly late at night, the news may not have been released until the following afternoon in a special edition of the PROPHECY.

But Minerva turned up in Privet Drive before Vernon left the house to go to work. Why?



After the fact, the "why" of it is clearly that Rowling arbitrarily sent her there to flip the on-switch of the series exposition machine. But she provided no real motivation for her

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presence, nor any explanation of how she knows to ask the questions she does ask but seems to know nothing of the arrest of Sirius Black, which presumably has also taken place by the time Albus turns up at #4.

Admittedly, we did not watch her there all day. We went off to the office with Vernon Dursley. Who happened to notice rather a lot of weirdos in cloaks over the course of that Tuesday. I'm of the opinion that these were Order members. Any of them might have noticed Minerva sitting on the wall and brought her up to date. Presumably early enough in the day that the news of Black's arrest had not yet broken.

Albus knew that the Potters were under threat. He'd been shut out of their arrangements by James's having declined his offer to be their Secret Keeper. But he knew the entire Prophecy. If the Potter's son was this foretold child, and the foretold child was to be marked, then it was practically a sure thing that the child would survive whatever had marked him. Arrangements would need to be made for his care. Harry Potter had a godfather, but no godmother, and I daresay that Albus didn't think highly of Sirius Black's likely competence at raising a child.

Nor, perhaps the likelihood of his surviving to do it. Black was known to be reckless.

I rather think Albus'd had various Order members periodically keeping an eye on the Dursleys ever since Harry was born. That could be why Minerva knew where to find them. Although since Vernon saw her consulting a map, she had probably not been a part of the Dursley watch rota.

This is probably also how the WW knew about that famous scar. Harry spotted Order members at least once during his

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childhood. In fact he'd probably been under their observation more often than he realized, but only Daedalus Diggle went out of his way to call attention to himself.



Consequently, any theorist, or fanfic author has to chose whether they are going to try to take Rowling at her word, even though her word does not add up to a rational timeline and she blatantly contradicts herself, try to make her inconsistencies somehow be consistent, or to ignore the whole contradiction.

For decades, those who tried to make it make sense, would take Hagrid's word for it. He isn't lying. He's honestly telling us his recollection of the events, and the whole business of Vernon Dursley's strange Tuesday and Minerva's losing a day on a wall were nothing more than an authorial hallucination which took place in some parallel universe.

Inside this reading, at some point after the Halloween feast, Snape reported his Dark mark disappearing, Albus sent Hagrid off to Godric's Hollow and left to notify the Ministry. Hagrid spoke to Minerva on his way out, she left the castle and Apparated directly to Little Whinging where she spent the evening on the Dursley's wall as a cat. Albus turned up as some point during the night, Hagrid joined them, they left Harry on the doorstep before the sun came up, and it all took place before dawn on Sunday morning.

Black, meanwhile is on a rat hunt. The other shoe on that issue doesn't drop until some time later, at least not until mid-morning.

Minerva couldn't be sure that the Potters had been attacked

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until she was able to ask Albus about it, but she isn't stupid. The fact that Hagrid had let it out that his orders were to take Harry Potter to his aunt's house would certainly have her suspecting as much.

Eliminating the references to wizards celebrating all over Britain and the Muggle radio announcer who evidently cannot read a calendar any better than Rowling can, is a loss which I think nobody would much miss.

I'll be returning to this matter at the end of this piece. But the actual contradiction in canon is clearly irresolvable.



Which isn't to say that a great many fans have not invested a whole lot of effort in trying to *make* it all make sense over the years. And I'm as guilty as any of them. Not that my own efforts were necessarily intended to be taken altogether seriously. Such as this one, which is emphatically NOT.

Post-Phoenix, I felt this whole issue was due for yet another re-evaluation.

So, we'll now go back, and from the vantage point of the end of Book 5, with all of its new information, let's take another look at just what we thought we knew about what took place over that 24 hour period. (Note: there was nothing whatsoever to contradict this theory in either HBP or DHs.)

On October 31, 1981, at some point between nightfall and midnight; the following events are understood to have taken place, exact order of occurrence unknown:

- Lord Voldemort shows up at the Potters' hideaway (without Wormtail, it appears, although Peter cer-

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tainly followed him). He kills James, confronts Lily who, at the cost of her own life, managed to keep him from murdering Harry, with such results as to cause his own disappearance.

If he had not already rendered himself deathless that would have been the end of his story. As things stand, we've suddenly got a situation no one anticipated.

This much is all a matter of common record by now.

Less certain, but readily believable, and more likely than not are:

- If the destruction of the Potter's house was not merely a side effect of Voldemort's use of a dangerously destabilized spell, Wormtail, alerted at once by seeing his Dark mark disappear, panics and Apparates to the Potters' hideaway, creates an explosion which damages the house, whether in an attempt to increase the general confusion, or possibly in order to break the Fidelius Charm without revealing the identity of the Secret Keeper by destroying what the Charm had been concealing, snatches his Master's wand (as well as James and Lily's? There are at least a half a dozen wands unaccounted for in Pettigrew's wake) and Apparates away, leaving Harry howling in the ruins.

Perhaps it should be noted that even though Peter might be perfectly well aware that the murder of Harry Potter was crucial to the Dark Lord's plans, he does not harm the child himself. He, himself, has nothing against Harry, and the Dark Lord is gone. Harry may live as long as he pleases, as far as Peter is concerned. Peter just wants off this particular game board, thank you very much.

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- Sirius Black, who claims to have arranged to check on Peter that evening, arrives at Peter's hideout to find Peter's quarters empty, with no sign of a struggle. The information we have been given to date states that Black and Pettigrew had both taken up "hidden" quarters at the same time the Potters went into hiding. Lupin may have done so as well, but he is just as likely to have been off with the werewolves and unapproachable. Black has a bad feeling about the situation — although apparently not bad enough to Apparate directly to the Potters' — or to check in through the 2-way mirror and give James some advance warning that something is up — and sets out for the Potters' house on the motorcycle which can travel both by air and, less conspicuously, by road. (Speaking of all-terrain vehicles...)

Also that night; and later:

- Albus Dumbledore is informed of the attack. The most likely scenario at our current state of information is that Snape, who had just taken up his position as a teacher at the school at the beginning of that same term, reported to Dumbledore that his Dark mark had suddenly disappeared, signifying the fall of the Dark Lord. Dumbledore apparently also realizes that the Potters' Fidelius Charm has failed, for he suddenly again knows the Potter's location. Dumbledore sends Hagrid to Godric's Hollow with instructions to collect Harry. It sounds very much as though Albus is already aware that James and Lily are dead, and that Harry has

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survived (probably because he does know the whole Prophecy). He may also have had the site monitored in some manner, or he has additional sources of information of which we have never been informed. Rowling's Never-Asked-Question regarding Albus's possession of James Potter's invisibility cloak was suggested as being relevant to this issue. But that was a washout. She was just belatedly trying to make the Cloak seem more mysterious than she had ever bothered to write it.

In any event Albus is definitely aware that the Fidelius Charm has been broken. His orders, according to Hagrid, are to get Harry out of the house and to take him to his aunt and uncle at #4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey. Dumbledore leaves Hogwarts after giving Hagrid his orders. Since Hagrid is not a qualified wizard, and is unable to Apparate he is most probably sent via Portkey. We know that Dumbledore can (and will) create a Portkey whenever necessary, and does not hesitate to do so. In this case I do not think Hagrid traveled by either Thestral or hypogryff. The timing was far too critical. Hagrid probably also had a Portkey to get from Godric's Hollow to wherever Albus had told him to go afterwards.

- Before departing on his mission, Hagrid either directly or inadvertently tells Minerva McGonagall that he is meeting Dumbledore at #4 Privet Drive at some unspecified time "tomorrow." Presumably this is in the course of explaining their absence from the school. He does not tell her that James and Lily are dead, nor that Harry survived. She later states that she learned this from the rumors that were flying about while she was

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keeping the Dursley home under surveillance.

- Hagrid is the first to arrive at Godric's Hollow, hears Harry crying and gets him out of the wreckage. Sirius arrives soon afterward, tries to convince Hagrid to let him take custody of his godson. Hagrid comforts Sirius but he "has his orders" and refuses to let him take the child. Sirius gives up, presses the motorcycle upon Hagrid, saying he "doesn't need it anymore" and Apparates away, leaving Hagrid with a wailing baby and a charmed motorcycle to contend with. Hagrid makes a virtue of necessity and departs on the motorcycle (off-road or otherwise). All are away from the scene before either the Muggle authorities or the Ministry of Magic's Magical Catastrophes Department show up.

The following events allegedly take place the next day, which is presumably November 1:

- Morning: Minerva McGonagall in her Animagus form of a cat is spotted in the neighborhood of Privet Drive by Vernon Dursley upon his leaving for work at 8:30 the morning. She keeps the house under surveillance until Dumbledore arrives at some point after bedtime.
- Unspecified time during the day: Confrontation between Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew on an unidentified Muggle street. Pettigrew kills a dozen random Muggle bystanders, presumably by blowing up a gas main, or conversely by a purely magical explosion, and fakes his own murder, making his getaway in his Animagus form of a rat. Magical Catastrophes Department Personnel show up immediately afterwards, Cornelius Fudge among

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them. They witness Sirius Black taken into custody by Aurors. Black is transferred to Azkaban without trial the same day on the authority of Barty Crouch Sr.

- Night: Albus Dumbledore appears in Privet Drive. Darkens the street lights, greets Minerva McGonagall and confirms the rumors she has heard regarding the Potters' deaths, Voldemort's fall and Harry's survival. States his intention to leave Harry with the Dursleys. At her protest he gives a simplified explanation of why. Hagrid shows up soon afterward on Black's motorcycle with Harry. He explains where he got the motorcycle, reports that he got Harry away before the Muggle authorities showed up, and says that he needs to take the vehicle back to Sirius Black. They leave Harry on the Dursley's doorstep and depart their separate ways. Albus restores the streetlights before he goes.



Well.

I don't know about you, but my continuity alert is going off like a klaxon.

This sequence contains one hell of a lot of unexplained knowledge on Dumbledore's part as well as one hell of a serious "disconnect."

Still, one can readily account for the presumed whereabouts of nearly all of the parties involved during that particular Tuesday, November 1 (which does not match up to 1981 on any Real World calendar) by a rudimentary filling in of all the blanks according to basic probabilities, amended by what we were later told in PoA.



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All except two.

As for the others:

Dumbledore: if he was as deep in the Ministry's war effort — in any capacity, either actively or as an advisor — as we were led to assume over the first 6 books, he would have been at the Ministry and up to his ears in conferences or whatever else, engaged in spin control.

Sirius spent the night attempting to track down Peter Pettigrew.

Pettigrew was holed up somewhere mapping out how he was going to engineer an escape which would keep Black, and the DEs, *and* the Aurors, all off his tail.

The rest of the Ministry wonks would have had their hands full. Cornelius Fudge and the rest of the Magical Catastrophes people would have been stretched to the limit trying to wrap up both Godric's Hollow and, later, the fallout from the Black/Pettigrew confrontation and to make sure that everyone who needed to have their memories modified had been traced and neutralized.

And ghod only knows what was going on at Hogwarts with rumors flying and both Dumbledore (presumably) and McGonagall (definitely) away.

Harry and Hagrid, however seem to go directly from the ruin at Godric's Hollow straight to #4 Privet drive the following evening without passing "Go," or indeed anything else. What is more, everything that Hagrid has ever had to say of the matter both in chapter 1 of PS/SS and later in the Three Broomsticks in PoA supports the reading that Dumbledore sent him to rescue Harry and take him directly to his mother's family in Little



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Whingeing before the sun comes up the following morning, without a pause.

Well. Just maybe he did.

After all, the Department of Mysteries had a Bureau of *Time Management*, didn't it?

And something so intrinsically related to the fall of the Dark Lord as young Harry Potter would certainly be high enough priority to get that Bureau involved. Particularly if this is on the Ministry's own orders.



But, if this is the case, they would hardly have gotten involved just on spec. Nor over anything that was essentially a triviality.

So; whatever happened, it was not trivial. And it probably took place on the Ministry's own watch.

And; ask yourself, just how did Dumbledore know to send Hagrid to collect Harry at a point in time that the only thing that could be known for sure was that the Dark Lord was gone? And why send Hagrid, who is not even a qualified wizard? (But who is certainly very well qualified to shift debris and dig any survivors out of the rubble.)

The original Changeling Hypothesis as it is detailed in the essay; 'Redeeming the Potterverse' offers one possible reason for the decision to leave Harry with the Dursleys despite their being perfectly horrible people. And it is absolutely clear that Albus Dumbledore, at least, knew very well that they were perfectly horrible people. But they were the best, and quite possibly the only, option he had. And he probably mistakenly believed that even being horrible, and being Muggles, the fact

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that Harry was their own nephew would prompt them to treat him at least half-way decently.

But, we mustn't overlook the possibility that the final decision may *not* have been left up to Dumbledore alone. Regardless of his position as the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

The explanation that Dumbledore gave to Minerva McGonagall at the opening of PS/SS was only a part of the reasoning. The shallowest and most surface part. The explanation concerning the Dursleys' blood relationship to Lily, and the protection that could be drawn from it, which was finally given to Harry at the end of OotP was almost certainly the primary factor (at least in the Rowlingverse). And Harry was truly protected from Voldemort while with the Dursleys in ways that he is not protected elsewhere.

But even that was probably not the only factor. The disappearance of Lord Voldemort and Harry's unaccountable survival were bound to have been a major subject of discussion and speculation throughout those "missing" 24 hours.

Dumbledore knew, and had been a contributor, or at the very least, an advisor to any attempts understand how the child had survived. But whatever it was that Lily Potter had actually done, would have been unknown at that point, and the potential ramifications of whatever methods she had used were highly theoretical. The resources that she used may never have been invoked in that particular form before. The long-term results were also theoretical and undetermined, and Albus would have absolutely nudged any discussion or debate away from any suggestion related to Horcruxes. The examiners could not be certain what had actually taken place and they did

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not know whether, or how deeply the child had been affected, or in what manner.

The wiser among them may even have anticipated that the boy could be a Changeling.

Given the uncertainties; for all that he appeared to be no more than a normal infant human wizard, The young Harry Potter was probably determined to be both in danger from and a possible danger to the wizarding world. In fact, the more cautious—or fearful—heads at the Ministry or in the Wizengamot may even have insisted upon the child's complete removal from the wizarding world.

For his own protection it was necessary that he be kept well away from the magical world until he came to Hogwarts, entrusted to a secure location where he could be shielded and kept under observation. And a family of Muggles who were already aware of the existence of magic could probably be trusted not to raise the kind of uproar that might direct the kind of attention to him that could be fatal in the Muggle world, or at least impossible to cover up. He could not safely be turned over to an orphanage, even if one could have been found in 1981.

The Dursleys' known opposition to magic may have been, in this instance, even a perceived advantage. They could be depended upon not to expose the boy to the wizarding world where they would not be able to protect him, and, in their home he would not be subject to undesirable magical influences. The Dursleys' unfamiliarity with the norms of raising young wizards would also keep them from panicking over anomalies or inadvertently tipping off any remaining Death Eaters or their supporters to the possibilities of there being something strange

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about the child. The Dursleys would simply chalk all untoward occurrences down to "magic." And, horrible as the Dursleys were, Dumbledore had reasonable confidence that they would not physically torture or actually starve the child.

Mrs. Figg, who is certainly old enough to remember both Lord Voldemort and the young Tom Riddle, was indeed set to keep watch over Harry. But not to protect him from the Dursleys, for which she had no authority. Nor was she stationed where she was only in order to detect the approach of possible ex-Death Eaters. Her primary duty was to monitor Harry's development, keep Dumbledore posted, and to raise the alarm if Harry should show signs of turning out to be a latter-day manifestation of Tom Riddle and reverting to type.

One belatedly wonders what contribution the Dursley's steady campaign of character assassination against their unwanted nephew might have had upon Mrs Figg's predominantly unsympathetic treatment of him.

Albus could not have been unaware that the Prophecy's promise of "the One" having been marked by the Dark Lord as his "equal" was a factor that could go any number of different directions. It certainly did not insure the One's alliance with the forces of Light.

With her mission in mind, Arabella Figg could not and did not take the risk of permitting herself to become deeply fond of Harry, any more than she encouraged him to become fond of her. [Irrelevant side note; from their physical descriptions, as well as other hints made in GoF, one is led to suspect that Mrs Figg's maiden name is likely to have been Perkins, and her brother to be Arthur Weasley's former co-worker in the Misuse

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of Muggle Artifacts Department.]

Later, when it became abundantly clear that the Hogwarts letters were not getting through — Arabella Figg was probably the one to alert Dumbledore to that development, as well.

It was Hagrid who was sent to collect the boy, in part because Dumbledore trusts Hagrid, but also because Hagrid was *another* one of the handful of people who remembers Tom Riddle as a youngster. It is uncertain how far Hagrid might have been informed regarding the possible ramifications of the situation. But, in any event, Hagrid saw no resemblance in Harry to anyone but James and Lily Potter.



We have been told by Rowling that in the Potterverse dead is dead. Consequently, time-tweaking to save James and Lily was never on the menu. In addition, from what we've seen, the government of the WW, like many of those in the Real World, is a corrupt system, largely ruled by expedience. The fact that the Potters' deaths appeared to have materially contributed to the fall of Voldemort assures that there was no hope of an attempt to save them. But there are an awful lot of other screwups that can be averted by time-tampering, and once averted, no one but those actually involved in the patch job will remember the original events, because those events will have then never actually happened.

Therefore; I propose that an adjustment of time was implemented on the Ministry's authorization, in order to facilitate Harry's removal from the wizarding world as soon after Voldemort's attack as could be arranged.

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Hermione's Time-Turner in Year 3 is bound to have been the simplest and most basic model. It was only designed to stretch time enough to provide her with some additional class time. But that gold watch of Dumbledore's with twelve hands and no numbers and little planets moving round the edge is now looking awfully suspicious to me.

So let's explore the possibilities of a hypothetically aborted timeline, shall we?



The simplest and most likely reading is that the period to be adjusted roughly matched the length of time between Hagrid's appearance at Godric's Hollow and his appearance at Privet Drive. Generally assumed to be approximately 24 hours, give or take a bit. A related probability is that to all outside appearances most subsequent matters during that period played out without any apparent changes between the two timelines.

So; things that almost certainly did NOT change between the timelines were:

- 1 Sirius still got to Godric's Hollow before either the Muggle emergency services or the Ministry of Magic.
- 2 Pettigrew still came to the conclusion that he needed to fake his own death in a manner which would take Sirius out of circulation. Peter couldn't depend upon Sirius accepting any "death" story, nor could he safely be left running about loose to tell his own version of events.

Things which certainly did NOT happen in the aborted timeline are:

- 1 Sirius got to Godric's Hollow, got Harry out of the

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ruins and made tracks to Dumbledore, explained the substitution, Pettigrew's betrayal, and took custody of his godson.

- 2 Sirius got to Godric's Hollow, got Harry out of the ruins and took him to Remus/the Longbottoms/any other unidentified Order members that he trusted, explained the substitution, Pettigrew's betrayal, and left to track down Peter.
- 3 Sirius got to Godric's Hollow, got Harry out of the ruins, took him to his own hideout, *and stayed there* until Dumbledore and the Ministry showed up, and then explained the substitution, Pettigrew's betrayal, and took formal custody of his godson.

If Sirius had told ANYONE of the substitution and Peter's betrayal during that period there would have been at least enough uncertainty to justify an investigation and trial, and Remus, who knew most of the necessary pieces of the puzzle would have backed Sirius up. Clearly, this did not happen.



One theory of what I suspect COULD have happened in that aborted timeline (details may be highly inexact) is:

Sirius got to Godric's Hollow, got Harry out of the ruins, took him to his hideout, tended his hurts and calmed him down. He sat with him for several hours, until Harry finally fell asleep. He did not think to notify anyone to bring them up to date. He spent much of the time castigating himself for his misjudgment and swearing revenge upon Peter, instead. He does not seem to have owned an owl, and his hideaway does not have

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an active Floo connection (too risky). Nor did he think to send a Patronus messenger. (Peripherally, I don't think Rowling had invented those yet. We never heard of them until HBP.)

Snape reports to Dumbledore that his Dark Mark has disappeared. Dumbledore alerts the Ministry of Magic that something has happened and the Dark Lord is gone. The Department of Magical Catastrophes sends a team to Godric's Hollow. Unfortunately the local Muggle authorities got there first, having been alerted to the explosion by neighbors, and there is a delay of some hours before the Ministry manages to sort out the situation enough to realize that there was a child's crib, but no child's body was recovered from the wreckage. This initiates a search for Harry Potter. Dumbledore is called to the Ministry to discuss the ramifications of what appears to have happened, and the child's disappearance. He identifies Black as the Potters' secret keeper and a manhunt is initiated.

It should be noted that Dumbledore, as a Legilimens himself should have realized the possibility that all it might have taken would have been for a captured Black to have looked Voldemort in the eye to have inadvertently betrayed the secret. This is one of the primary reasons he had been offering his own services in the matter. At this point the manhunt is primarily intended to determine what has become of Black, who may also be presumed to be dead.

Pettigrew, in his Animagus form, takes up a position in the neighborhood of Sirius's hideaway. He, Sirius and Remus all know how to find one another. He lurks about where he cannot be seen from the windows or door and waits for Sirius to leave his quarters. [Note: I believe this happened in both

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timelines. The official canon version, according to Fudge is that “Peter tracked him down.” In the official timeline Sirius spent the hours of the night searching for Peter, and only encountered him upon returning home.]

In the morning, Sirius leaves Harry sleeping and steps out into the street. His exact errand is unknown, but presumably it is either something to do with Harry, and/or, to finally notify somebody regarding the situation by Owl Post. Peter takes his own form accuses Sirius of treachery, and when Sirius throws a hex at him, sets off explosion to fake his own death and cover his escape.

Magical Catastrophes team shows up, Magical Law Enforcement team shows up. Law Enforcement team knows there is a manhunt out for Black and leaps to conclusions. Sirius either raves that “it wasn’t me, it was Peter!” and isn’t believed, or is stunned by Aurors before he has a chance to say anything and removed to Azkaban. (Note: the “taken away laughing” scenario does not fit in this timeline. Sirius now has Harry to consider and would have kept better control of himself than that.)

Conversely; explosions are difficult things to control, and Peter doesn’t really try very hard. In this enactment of the event Sirius may have been injured and unconscious when Aurors arrive. In fact, in this version, Sirius may even have been killed along with the Muggles, as Pettigrew had probably intended.

Harry is eventually discovered in Sirius’s quarters once Lupin is contacted and asked about their location. Harry, now orphaned and without a designated legal guardian is taken to the Ministry of Magic, possibly as a ward of the Ministry.

Which we already know to have been riddled with Voldemort’s moles.

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(Although, if it was as easy to subvert and overthrow the Ministry as it was in DHs, we have no good explanation of why it wasn’t done that way the first time.)



By this time every Death Eater alive knows that the Dark Lord has been defeated, and they soon enough catch the rumors that Harry Potter had something to do with it. Some of these DEs are fairly clever people, and they also realize that Harry must be somehow “magically protected” so they don’t risk trying to kill him themselves. But that knowledge only makes the kid even more of a potential problem.

But, just how difficult can it be to deal with an infant who is too young to even tell people what happened if the plan goes wrong?

Plus, from Snape in HBP we get the information that some of the DEs considered that young Harry Potter might be a powerful Dark wizard in his own right, and a possible standard around which they might all rally once more.

What I *suspect* may have happened is that at some point between Harry being brought to the Ministry, presumably by mid-morning, and that same evening, Harry simply disappeared.

Completely.

And whoever was responsible did it so smoothly that the panicked investigators not only didn’t have a clue, they couldn’t see any prospect of *getting* a clue. At least not in the foreseeable future. Possibly not for years. The boy was presumably in the hands of the Ministry’s enemies.

Which, on top of some of the implications of the Changeling possibility was determined to be simply too big a risk for the

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wizarding world and the Ministry to be expected to take. Even leaving aside the public relations nightmare such a disappearance entailed. The situation was totally out of control.

In fact, the situation was deemed bad enough to authorize a time adjustment, and to get that child out of the wizarding world and into someplace where no one else was likely to trace him, but someone in authority could keep track of him. (Albus, of course, offered to do the honors.)

And to go back and do it at the earliest point it could be managed. Immediately after Voldemort's fall, in fact.

And also to do it in a manner that would involve the smallest number of people.



Ultimately the only people who actively participated in the exercise were Dumbledore, Hagrid, and, by default, Harry, but it is possible that some of the Ministry wonks who set the project up remember the original timeline, or scraps of it, as well. Otherwise it is difficult to account for the widespread knowledge across the wizarding world of Harry's distinctive scar if no one else saw him after he was removed from the house in Godric's Hollow. (Unless someone simply had the bright idea to stand Hagrid a few rounds at the Leaky Cauldron. Or chatted up Arabella Figg. These days, I'm more inclined to believe that much of the Order had known of the Dursley's location before the attack on the Potters, and had occasionally looked in.)

Dumbledore, probably using some method other than that of a basic Time-Turner like the one used by Hermione, returns to his own office at a point in time immediately after his orig-

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inal departure to the Ministry. He sends for Hagrid at once. Dumbledore explains that he needs Hagrid to rescue Harry and take him straight to his relatives. He may or may not also explain that there will be a time adjustment. He may have also told Hagrid to let Minerva know that they would both be away from the school all day (He had already told her that he would be away before leaving for the Ministry the first time.) Hagrid leaves, and Dumbledore either departs for some undetermined destination, probably back to the Ministry, or simply retires from general view at Hogwarts. It would not do for him to be known to be in two places at once.

Hagrid passes the message, saying more than he intended, but not much more. Possibly no more than that he will be meeting Dumbledore at #4 Privet Drive "tomorrow." He departs by portkey.

Hagrid arrives at Godric's Hollow by way of portkey some time before Sirius arrives by way of motorcycle, although he misses Pettigrew. Indeed, his arrival may have scared Pettigrew off. He pulls Harry from the rubble, and the following scene plays out as in canon.

The Department of Magical Catastrophes eventually shows up at Godric's Hollow, and Post owls fly at night as well as during the daytime. Before breakfast the rumors of the Dark Lord's fall have reached the school. Minerva is frantic to know what has really happened. Dumbledore, who is keeping out of sight is not available. Hagrid, the last person to speak to Dumbledore, is not available. She knows where Dumbledore is expected to turn up at some point during the day and leaves to stake out Privet Drive immediately after an early breakfast.

Sirius spends the rest of the night searching for Peter. He



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encounters him upon returning to his own hideout. Confrontation plays out as in canon.

There is the scant possibility that the Ministry did make a stab at trying to save Pettigrew. A 20-member team from the Dept. of Magical Law Enforcement sounds a bit excessive to apprehend a man who is wanted primarily just for questioning. And, under normal circumstances an explosion in a Muggle street is not automatically regarded to be a matter of wizarding criminal wrongdoing. Although I will concede that during Vold-War I it probably too often was.

Whether it was standard Ministry policy to deploy such a pair of teams (DMLE and Magical Catastrophes) on the report of any such public occurrence is uncertain. It is just possible that someone who was a party to the time adjustment had given the word to deploy the teams shortly before the time the confrontation was known to have taken place in the first timeline in an attempt to forestall it. But with the need to tend to Harry out of the equation, the confrontation took place earlier in the day than it did the first time round and they were too late. The greater probability, however, is that they did not attempt to meddle in the timeline any more than absolutely necessary, and the confrontation was left to play out naturally.

Dumbledore arrives in Privet Drive in plenty of time to make arrangements and discovers Minerva waiting for him. He puts out the street lights in order to conceal the anticipated (silent, Portkey) appearance of a half-giant with a baby in the middle of the street. He confirms the rumors while waiting for the anticipated time of Hagrid's arrival.

Hagrid, however, does not appear in the street by Portkey

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as anticipated. Dumbledore brings out the watch to ascertain that the time adjustment procedure has in fact taken place, remarks that Hagrid is late. He seems unworried, probably only anticipating some delay at Godric's Hollow. A few minutes later the noise of the motorcycle is heard in the distance by both he and Minerva. (The time shift evidently having taken place while Hagrid and Co. were airborne. They probably didn't even notice it.)

Hagrid arrives, they leave Harry on the doorstep. They depart separately. Albus restores the streetlights before he goes.



Well, it certainly hits all the high points.

There is not much likelihood that it's true.

We wouldn't ever be told whether it was true or not, of course.

Because it does not matter. Nothing that took place during the "missing" 24-hours has any effect upon the story as it *now* stands or how it was projected to go.

And, consequently, JK Rowling has absolutely no intention of telling us what happened during that 24 hours.

Because it never did.



Toward the end of the days of open canon some additional attention was drawn to this particular period of time within the story arc.

In August of 2006, Rowling tossed us all a "theory bone" to gnaw on related to the question of why Albus Dumbledore had the keeping of James Potter's invisibility cloak, given that Albus

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did not need a cloak to become invisible.

(Toward the end of September of the same year Ms Rowling — mercifully — debunked the growing theory that Severus Snape had been lurking about at Godric's Hollow under James's cloak the night that the Potters were murdered.)

So, she asked; how did Albus come to have James's cloak?
I've got an even better question.

We know that James and Sirius had had a pair of communication mirrors ever since Hogwarts. When Sirius went to check on Peter and found him missing why didn't he mirror James and ask whether he knew what was up? Or at least tell him that something was looking dicy so he and Lily might have at least some sort of advance warning?

Oh no, instead you get on your motorbike and ride there in analog (off-road or otherwise) and kill an hour or so on the road before you get there — after the shouting is over.

Mind you, I did think that there was something a bit dicy about our attention being drawn to that cloak all of a sudden. And rightly so, because the cloak turned out to be completely irrelevant to the whole issue.

But at the time I supposed that it might be useful toward plugging another long-standing gap in our information.

From the very first book Harry has been told that he lived because his mother died to save him. Albus assures us of this.

How does Albus know?

HE wasn't there.

Snape wasn't there either. They were both in plain sight at the Halloween feast at Hogwarts.

So who told Albus? And how did they find out?

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And Rowling has never bothered to settle *that* question.

We're just supposed to accept it, on her say-so, upon no kind of evidence whatsoever.

Given the number of times Rowling has been caught out lying to us, I'm no longer inclined to accept her say-so without at least *some* supporting evidence.

Albus couldn't do a *Priori Incantatum* on Voldemort's wand since Pettigrew had taken it away with him. (And when we *did* get a *Priori Incantatum* from that wand it appears to have skipped right over anything LV might have thrown at Harry, so that wouldn't have been much help.)

Rowling tells us in interviews that what Lily did had not ever been done before. Indeed, she tells us that Lily did not even know that it would work. So whatever it was is not likely to have been anything that was either documented, or could have been anticipated; it did not fit any established pattern; Albus wasn't there. How could he know what it was that Lily did?

And yet he evidently did know. Or *claims* to. There he is, explaining how it worked to Harry by the end of PS/SS. Was he just lying again?

In fact Albus was so sure of his interpretation of events that he went ahead and layered his own Dursley-protection scheme onto Harry on the strength of it! That's a mighty large assumption to be making in the absence of any kind of actual information.

Or perhaps there is something about the creation of a Horcrux which is so self-evident to the informed that there is really only one way it can go wrong. But Rowling doesn't even seem to give us any indication of that.

In short, as presented, the whole issue is balogmium.

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Even if it didn't need to be.

Over on the (now defunct) Spinner's End board we went round and round on this between HBP and DHs, and came up with the rather fun theory that there was a former Headmaster or Headmistress's portrait installed at Godric's Hollow to serve as a messenger if the Potters needed to contact Albus or the rest of the Order, or for Albus to keep them posted on developments outside their hiding place.

The portrait overheard the confrontation between Lily and Voldemort and got out of the frame when the spell crashed and they heard Harry wailing in the rubble. As soon as Albus got to his office after the Feast it filled him in on the developments.

It plays, certainly. In fact, it plays extremely well. Particularly if the house in Godric's Hollow was actually Albus's house, inherited from his mother, and offered to the Potters as a refuge. But we have no information in canon which would establish that, either.

And, for what it's worth, I'm not altogether convinced that we do know that the Potter's Fidelius was on the House rather than its occupants. Although it still seems to be the most likely premise.



But about that cloak.

I suspect that Lily knew James very well, and she knew he had a tendency to take silly risks. She and Albus may have talked James into loaning the cloak to Albus to have someone in the Order use on their behalf while they were in hiding. And, just coincidentally, to keep James from playing at silly bugs with it and faffing about where he wasn't safe. (Lily even

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suggests something of that nature in her letter to Sirius which turned up at #12.)

The most widely accepted fan theory was that since James wasn't cooperative over the choice of Secret Keeper, Albus may have decided to hedge his bets by posting someone in that invisibility cloak within view of where the house was suppose to be.

It would have certainly fit Albus's demonstrated methods for him to have posted a sentry under an invisibility cloak. That's what he did in OotP, after all. Even though his sentry couldn't find the Potters, they could have seen whether anyone else showed up at the house. Or in the street. Or in the village.

And, regarding a theory posted by someone else over on one of the large official fan sites, if that sentry was Frank Longbottom, it could explain why Bellatrix thought the Longbottoms might know something of what became of her Master.

But by this time, I would say that Rowling never intended to take us there. I think that August of 2006 was simply the point at which she suddenly got the brainstorm to take her backstory regarding the Deathstick — which had probably always been one of her planned reveals for Book 7 — and pump it up into a whole new theme regarding the Deathly Hallows, rolling Harry's cloak into a package along with the stone and the wand. For the cloak certainly served no unique purpose over the course of DHs. Or at least none which it had not served in any of the previous books. And its qualities, apart from exceptional durability, seem to have been no different from those any other invisibility cloak we have ever heard of.

We never got any kind of a build-up regarding the Stone whatsoever.

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So, I'm afraid I failed to take the bait. I certainly didn't insist on there having been another Order member on watch at Godric's Hollow. But Albus could have borrowed the cloak for some other operation the Order was involved in somewhere else altogether. I suspected that Moody didn't have two such cloaks back then (or indeed, not until 1995 when he appropriated the one that had belonged to the Crouches). And what is more, in 1981, Moody was still an active Auror, not a retired one, and may have needed his own cloak himself. It does fit what we've seen of Albus's methods to have posted a sentry, but he may have only developed that method in '95, because he *didn't* post a sentry in '81.

But, if he did, the sentry would have either seen the house pop back into existence when the Charm failed, or he would have seen Voldemort arrive and known that the jig was up. And since Albus himself was evidently aware that the Fidelius had failed, a sentry is hardly necessary.

If there had been a sentry, whoever it was not only did nothing to assist the Potters, but also didn't see Pettigrew to recognize him. He may *not* have missed seeing a rat follow Voldemort into the house. (I'm remembering Swythyn's pointing out to us that Argus Filch was boarding up the mouse holes in PoA when everyone was battenning the hatches against Sirius Black.)

But clearly, there wasn't a sentry. And Albus, even in the celestial King's Cross, is still lying to Harry about when he borrowed that cloak. Lily's letter states that it had already been borrowed in practically the same breath as she recounts Harry's birthday tea, whereas Albus mendaciously claims he had borrowed it "a few days" before Tom came calling. And I doubt



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that it was Lily who was lying.

And we still don't know where Albus got his assurance that Harry had survived. (Now, long after the fact, I conclude that Albus was sure that Harry had survived, because the Prophecy *required* that he survive.)

Did Pettigrew, in a last gesture before disappearing, fire off a Patronus to the Headmaster reporting "All is lost! Black has betrayed us! Potters dead. Harry survived"? With his own engineered "death" the following day to underscore the accusation and his own presumed innocence?

We simply don't have the information which is critical for filling this major gap in our knowledge. And for a (very short) while it looked like the cloak might be relevant for doing that.

In fact there appeared to be a good chance that that kind of thing is what all this sudden mystery about the cloak was in aid of in the first place.

Well, no such luck.



And, as stated at the beginning this article; I repeat, in the year 2021, over the course of an email correspondence, I was been given cause to take yet another look at the problem of the "missing" 24 hours.

Particularly since it is clear from the actual text that it *isn't* just 24 hours that are giving us this problem. It's more like 72.

Which we ought to have already known. We were, after all, aware of it. In the Scholastic edition of PS/SS (I don't know about the Bloomsbury editions), it quite clearly states that the story opens with Vernon Dursley setting off to work on a dull



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grey *Tuesday* morning.

Which, according to any real world calendar, if this is supposed to be 1981, would have been November 3.

sigh

The main issue is that Rowling notoriously cannot read a calendar. And she absolutely never makes even the most cursory attempt to cross-check her storyline against any kind of real-world calendar and make the dates match up.

Although, in fairness, when she sat down to write this story in or around 1990, I seriously doubt that she had access to a computer with a handy calendar program where it would take all of two minutes to enter in a date and have it show you what day of the week that was. If she had truly wanted to line up her days/dates for 1981 it would have taken some legitimate research. Plus, I suspect that she was assuming that no one would read it but little kids, and the kids wouldn't care. (Imho *Bloomsbury* at least *ought* to have cared.)

Plus, it has to be admitted that the text never actually does come out and say that Harry was dumped on Petunia's doorstep on the morning of November 1. It's very strongly *implied*, but much of that implication stems retrospectively from Hagrid's account in PoA, where he makes it sound like he took Harry from the house at Godric's Hollow, refused to let Sirius have him, and carried him off straight to Little Whinging.

We also get a false note from Minerva, and another minor glitch with a radio announcer noting the fireworks that the wizards were setting off and pointing out that Bonfire Night "isn't until next week, folks."

Which would be wrong even if Harry *had* been dropped on

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the Dursleys doorstep on the First. Halloween was on Saturday. Whether the story opens on the first or the third, you just don't get Bonfire Night not happening until "next week." Bonfire Night will be *this Thursday*. I think we can safely dismiss the radio announcer, he's a fool.

We can readily fanwank Minerva's comment, and easily reinterpret Hagrid's multiple statements on the subject, and we can just ignore the radio announcer's lack of accuracy.

However, this time I'm going to try to work the problem from the other end. This time it's Hagrid's account which I will dismiss. And we'll see if we can make that work any better



In this iteration we cannot in any good conscience dismiss the statement of the omniscient narrator who tells us that this is all taking place on a Tuesday. If it was Tuesday in 1981, then it had to be November 3. And, upon closer examination, it's really not *that* difficult to see how it might very well be exactly that.

Which would also explain the amount of information that Minerva was spouting to Albus about what had been going on across the WW once he showed up in Little Whinging.

Once the scene was set, and there was another character available to generate dialogue, she basically became an exposition machine for much of the chapter. It's Minerva who gives us whatever background Rowling was willing to let us have. The WW's reaction to current events, the existence of the Statute of Secrecy, Albus's public image, and a capsule summary of the murder of Harry's parents. There's probably other information as well, but those all seem to be the main points. Compared to

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Minerva, Albus actually gives us very little useful information at all. (Typical.)

But all of this is information that Minerva would have had no way of knowing yet if it really *was* the day after the attack and she'd been sitting on a wall all day. With the timeline we are encouraged to believe this was taking place in, there is no way that she could have known anything of the current happenings. She basically got dropped into the story like a *Deus ex Machina* to tell the reader what was going on, and what we were all supposed to think about it. At that point, we had no choice but to accept it. But it really doesn't hold water.

The whole missing/extra 24 hours business is intractable, and the fact that, acto the omniscient narrator, Harry was clearly stated as being dumped on the Dursleys on Tuesday night (or early Wednesday morning) is non-negotiable.

So let's go back and take another look at all of it with a view of this all taking place some three days after the Potters were murdered.

Admittedly, Hagrid has not ever been what anyone could call a reliable witness, even if he is a truthful one. Plus, it was his account in PoA which set up the "missing" 24 hours conundrum in the first place. So its reliability is already compromised.

If we completely disregard Hagrid's statements for the moment, the rest of what we are left with falls into place fairly easily, and does actually make sense of everything else that we are shown.

The Potters are murdered Saturday night. Snape reports his Dark Mark's disappearance. Albus realizes that the Fidelius no longer affects him, and sends Hagrid, probably by portkey to

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investigate and give assistance to any survivors.

Albus already knows that Snape had asked Tom to spare Lily. He may very much doubt that Tom did so, but it was still a possibility. And he really needs to know what has become of Harry. For all Albus knows at that point, the Prophecy may now have been fulfilled, and both Harry *and* Tom are no longer an issue. Although he no doubt considers *that* unlikely, too.

Meanwhile Albus, states his decision to place Harry with Lily's sister, if he has survived. He tells Hagrid about it, gives him the Dursley's location, and says that he will send word to let him know when to bring Harry and have him meet him there. Either he or Hagrid also lets Minerva know something of this plan. Albus, after all, was told that Sirius was supposed to have been the Potters' Secret Keeper. Consequently, Albus is absolutely not going to turn Harry over to *him*. Particularly since there is every likelihood that Sirius had been captured by DEs and is already dead.

Hagrid gets Harry out of the ruin, Sirius turns up, Hagrid comforts him (Hagrid doesn't know that Sirius is supposed to be the Secret Keeper, after all), but refuses to turn Harry over to him, accepts the motorcycle, and takes Harry back to Hogwarts and brings him to Poppy.

Poppy deals with Harry's injuries and probably puts him into a healing sleep. One of the Hogwarts Elves probably takes charge of tending him.

Albus has already gone off and spends all of Sunday at the Ministry engaged in a search for Sirius Black, and matters of public disclosure, and spin control.

The rumors may or may not make it to Hogwarts over the

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course of Sunday, but The PROPHET breaks the news with the Monday edition, and probably continues with various reiterations of the story for most of the following week. Meanwhile, Albus who flooded off to the Ministry before breakfast, does not return to the school all day, being still engaged at the Ministry. There are a lot of brush fires to be stomped out at the Ministry, Plus a lot of mustering of Albus's allies on the Wizengamot. There are going to be a lot of investigations and trials to schedule. This process spills over into, and eats up, the following couple of days.

The level of disruption at Hogwarts is such that classes are canceled for part of the week, leaving the staff a bit at loose ends. Meanwhile most of the WW is partying in celebration of the end of the war. This also spills over into the next couple of days.

The confrontation between Black and Pettigrew does not take place until early on Monday. We do not know how long Sirius spent hunting Peter before returning to his own flat and running into the ambush that Peter had set up.

At that point in the century, most of London businesses would have been closed on a Sunday, which the first of November was. There would not have been the kind of crowds out on the street for an explosion to be able to have killed as many as a dozen bystanders on a Sunday. Given the casualty count, I would hazard a guess that Sirius's flat was probably on an upper floor of a building in a predominantly commercial area, rather than off in a quieter residential district. I would also be inclined to suspect that it was near a major Underground or railroad station, and, consequently would get a lot of foot traf-

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fic. Particularly during morning rush hour.

Or, not impossibly, evening rush hour. Cornelius Fudge's account of the confrontation gives no suggestion as to when during the day the murder of Pettigrew and a dozen Muggles took place. If Sirius Black made any statement in the Shrieking Shack regarding precisely when Peter had tricked him, the fact that virtually no statement that we have ever been given by Sirius Black has ever held up to closer examination, would render his testimony problematic, from the get-go.

Meanwhile, Albus had assigned at least some of the Order to sentry duty in or around Little Whinging to be on the alert for Sirius Black, who they all knew by sight. Vernon spotted at least a few of them.

Whatever time of day the confrontation with Pettigrew takes place, and however quickly Sirius is apprehended and packed off to Azkaban, the Ministry is still likely to be keeping a tight hold on what is released to the press, and when. Even bypassing a trial, the whole business is also likely to generate a lot of red tape, and Albus is there until quite late in the evening. He probably had dinner in London with members of the Wizengamot that he wants to influence going forward, given the pending circus of DE trials. He returns to the castle very late, and departs for London early enough on Tuesday, that no one in the castle, that we know of, had a chance to speak with him.

The story regarding Black's arrest did not break before Tuesday. Hagrid seems not to have read it yet, as of Tuesday night. Minerva also seems to have already taken up her position on the Dursley's front wall before she got her copy of the Prophet, for Hagrid's mention of having borrowed Black's motorcycle

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prompts no reaction from her.

On Tuesday, with Albus *still* not available, Minerva goes off to Little Whinging and stakes out the Dursley's house, to take a turn of sentry duty, herself.

Once Albus is finally free of his obligations, he sends a Patronus to Hagrid asking him to bring Harry and meet him at #4 Privet drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, at a specific time. The time specified would be after dark, when Hagrid would be less likely to draw attention.

Hagrid was already given a portkey, but does not use it. Since I doubt that Hagrid had ever been to Privet Drive, at this point we can happily endorse the Deluminator (which in the Scholastic edition is referred to as a "Put Outer") as a tracking and monitoring device theory, which has sprung up in the wake of DHs, and let it guide Hagrid to the proper location.

The fact that those members of the Order who have been watching the place since the Potters' murder now know where it is, explains how Harry managed to catch sight of a few of them during his childhood. It also explains how the information regarding that distinctive scar of his got out into common knowledge.

Even Hagrid's statement regarding having got Harry out of the ruin before the Muggle emergency services showed up, inviting us to believe that he has brought Harry to Little Whinging directly from Godric's Hollow, which one would otherwise expect to be out of place, turns out to be more understandable if assumed to be a bit of talking at cross-purposes. Hagrid, after all, hasn't seen Albus since Albus gave him his first orders, so he is finally making his initial report.

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Albus, who had probably given Hagrid a portkey for the purpose, wasn't expecting him to arrive on a motorcycle. He asks about it. Hagrid says he borrowed it from Black, and Albus asks if there had been any trouble about that. Hagrid, of course, misunderstands the context, and assures Albus that no, there was no trouble, he got Harry away before the Muggles showed up. Hagrid doesn't realize that the question had actually been whether *Sirius Black* had given him any trouble. And, since by this time Sirius Black is already packed off to Azkaban, Albus does not pursue the matter further.

Ergo: Hagrid brought Harry back to Hogwarts on the motorcycle on Saturday night, but he didn't bring the motorcycle into the castle, Albus never saw it, and wasn't around for some days during the crisis. Hagrid didn't think to mention he had it at any point, and wouldn't have seen Albus to mention it anyway.

Now that Albus has seen it, and asked whether Black gave Hagrid any trouble, Hagrid thinks Albus is asking whether he had any trouble in general, and says no, he got away before the Muggles showed up.

Albus has enough on his plate at that point that he never stops to consider the contradiction of treacherous DE Sirius having helpfully given Hagrid his precious motorcycle, and gone off leaving Hagrid with the baby, rather than mounting an attack against the child. Albus has made his plans, formed his justifications, and is not going to see anything which conflicts with them.

As to the false note from Minerva; Minerva raises the issue of rumors that Voldemort was defeated "last night."

Minerva, in general, is a much more reliable witness than Hagrid, but this is clearly inaccurate. The statement is not com-

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pletely unsalvageable, however. She says “last night” but she hasn’t slept since Monday night. And she’s been sitting on the Dursleys garden wall for a good 18 hours. She may be rigid and upright, but she wouldn’t be human if she weren’t extremely tired. *And* we also don’t know just when the PROPHET broke the story of Voldemort’s defeat. By “last night” she may still be thinking of Sunday night, and it’s only when she returns to the castle that she realizes that the attack had actually been on Halloween.

Just about all of our information regarding the actual attack, after all, only comes to us in retrospect, and years later. And usually from Hagrid, too. Either to Harry, when Hagrid takes him to do his school shopping, or at the 3 Broomsticks a dozen years after the event.

(I completely disregard that totally crackfic “flashback” of Tom fantasizing about how the attack on the Potters *ought* to have gone, while on his way to Godric’s Hollow to intercept Harry who has fallen into the Bagshott trap.)

Regarding Hagrid’s 3 Broomsticks account; it might be simplest to draw a line between two points and just assume that Hagrid left out the bits of the story that he considered uninteresting. This alone would reconcile just about every problem that the fans have raised over this account in the past 20+ years.

Digging Harry out of the ruin, and speaking with Sirius Black was interesting. Taking Harry to meet Albus at his aunt’s house in Surrey later on was also interesting. Taking Harry back to Hogwarts and waiting around until Albus sent word to bring him to Surrey, wasn’t.

So he didn’t bother to tell people that part. Minerva, at least,

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would have already known it, in any case.

Or, at any rate, that’s about the least convoluted way that I can see where you can have Harry being dumped on the Dursleys on a Tuesday. As the 3rd-party narrator claims he was.

Which really isn’t difficult to believe at all.

But, like I say, these days, the reader is usually more inclined to just take Hagrid’s word for it and regard most of Book 1 Chapter 1 as a “likely story,” told by a narrator who makes things up.



The Quirrell Debacle

This is another of the essays which has been around since the collection was first uploaded in April, 2003.

There has been some refining and development over the years, but for the most part, my main premise was established from the beginning.



By now it ought to be clear to any reader of PS/SS over the age of about 15 that in a rational universe, Dumbledore and the staff of Hogwarts would have been on the alert throughout the school year, waiting for an attempt to be made to steal the Philosophers' Stone. Or at any rate Dumbledore would. Why else would there have been a Labyrinth of challenges set up to "protect" it?

After all, you cannot assume that Albus just suddenly took it into his head to show up on the Flamels' doorstep one summer morning and talk his friend and former partner, into giving up the Philosopher's Stone — possibly forever — so he could take it off to the school and use it as bait for a Voldy-trap purely on spec.

It is also clear to the adult reader that there was a lot more going on that year than Harry and his friends ever realized, and, most likely, more than they eventually managed to figure out after the shouting was over, either. We probably still do not know everything about what was going on behind the scenes during Harry's first year. And we probably never will. Harry and his friends were just too young to consider the big picture, and they were the ones asking all the questions.

What we are given to understand, however, is that the situation was set in motion by the folly of young Professor Quirrell.



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One of the many things that we do not know about Quirrell is just *how* young Professor Quirrell actually was, nor for how long he actually was a teacher at Hogwarts. Although we have a much better idea now, given the revelations of HBP, and the timeline adjustments forced upon us in DHs.

Neither do we know — for certain — how long Quirrell had been the stammering wreck that we met when Harry did.

Some of our confusion is based upon various statements made by Rubeus Hagrid, who, however sincere, is simply not the most credible of sources. We really do just seem to have a continuing problem accepting "the world according to Rubeus Hagrid." For one thing, objectivity is a foreign concept to him, and his biases keep getting in our way.

Hagrid first tells us that Quirrell was "all right while he was studying out of books," but, then, he went off for a year to get practical experience, and came back "frightened of his subject, frightened of his students" and then went on to do a great deal more grumbling in that vein. Which, to me sounded remarkably as though Quirrell had already been a teacher at the school before taking that fatal sabbatical. Given that we now know that Dumbledore has never, over his entire 30+ years as Headmaster, managed to keep a teacher in the DADA position long enough to actually finish out a year, this suggestion offers a distinct level of "disconnect."

By the time the series was finished, there was a widespread off-canon understanding that Quirrell had taught Muggle Studies prior to his sabbatical, but such a statement was never made



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in the course of the books, (nor, for that matter on Rowling's original official website) so accepting it is optional. Rowling's whole treatment of Quirrell is dismissive. Like the Philosopher's Stone itself, he was used once, and discarded.

If we ignore that reading, it is just possible that Quirrell's appointment as DADA instructor in Harry's first year was in the nature of a rematch.

By contrast, at the end of Goblet of Fire, Voldemort paints Quirrell as young, foolish and over-confident. Easily taken over. I'm not sure but that a rematch sounds even *more* likely from that account.

After all, we don't know whether the DADA position jinx dissipates when you leave the castle. Nor, if Quirrell did teach DADA for a year *before* that sabbatical, whether he is the only survivor of that jinx who ended up taking on Tom himself — in one form or another before the year was out. For there is every indication that he *wasn't* the only one.

We just don't *care* about Umbridge.



Our main in-canon source of information regarding Quirrell is Percy Weasley who comes across sounding very much as though he already knew Quirrell prior to Harry and Ron's first year, and seems to have regarded him with a great deal of personal admiration. Well, if there is one thing that has become clear over the course of the series, it is that Percy thoroughly admires competence when he is shown it. Rather more than he does character, unfortunately. You really don't get the impression that Quirrell's character was ever a strong one.



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Percy's input on this subject is also our first introduction of the persistent "Snape wants the DADA position" rumor, which was originally presented in the context of a modified crowing session over it having been Quirrell who got the position rather than Snape.

Which *originally* suggested to me that if Percy is still inclined to crow about it, he may have been acquainted with Quirrell when Quirrell was a student himself. Quirrell was introduced as a *young* man, after all.

This reading just does not work, however, since it was Quirrell who also first introduced the "Severus hated your father too" theme to the series, and he could scarcely have been in a position to do so unless he had witnessed at least a part of that conflict.

After all, Voldemort would hardly have bothered to tell Quirrell about *that*. For that matter, Voldemort had been nowhere near Hogwarts during the Snape/Marauder cohort's time there.

So, my reasoning went; Quirrell would have to have been relatively new to the Hogwarts staff, which, given his alleged youth is hardly a surprise. But then had he been on staff before his "sabbatical"? Is *that* why Percy was so gleeful over the fact that they had Quirrell teaching DADA instead of Snape? Was Quirrell simply the first of the string of one-year wonders to have volunteered to come back?

It is at least a possibility. And since we are never going to actually know one way or the other, I am going to adopt it as a tentative hypothesis. (As stated above, allegedly Rowling has since claimed that Quirrell formerly taught Muggle Studies. That's another Hogwarts subject with an unfortunate record on retaining instructors. So, for that matter is Care of Magical Creatures.)



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As to Quirrell's character; when the different accounts are compared I am somewhat more inclined to believe Voldemort's reading of Quirrell's original character than Hagrid's. A wizard whose nerve is already broken is unlikely to have been exploring dangerously haunted forests in Albania. And one who is inclined to overconfidence is more likely to have been willing to return to what is generally rumored to be a cursed position. Particularly if the curse has already bitten him once.

Nevertheless, while Hagrid's reading of the situation seems likely to be inaccurate when applied to any specific details, it sounds basically true at its heart. Quirrell probably was "all right" when he was still studying (or teaching) out of books. But the jumpiness he was showing by the time Harry met him was probably a very recent development and Hagrid's statement regarding his performance on the job now sounds more in the nature of a prediction than an observation. The nerve-shattered Quirrell had not yet been put to the test in the classroom.

But Hagrid had already encountered him that state in whatever meeting Dumbledore had called with the groundskeeper, the Heads of House and the DADA instructor in preparation for setting up the Labyrinth of challenges to protect the Philosopher's Stone. Hagrid no doubt formed his opinion at that point, and, as far as it goes, it was a sound one.

So long as we are at it, Hagrid's "prediction" on the subject was a good deal more accurate than most of Trelawney's. Hagrid is not what anyone will ever regard as clever. But he is often fairly shrewd.



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As to Quirrell's jumpiness being due to an encounter with a vampire or a Hag, I think we can safely put this, and indeed his whole performance down to being a preemptive cover story that Quirrell had turned loose himself, expecting it to explain any potential "strangeness" in his behavior (like muttering to himself) that might be observed in the future.

For that matter, I think that the jumpiness itself was at least partly performance art to disguise any possible slip-ups which might occur during the upcoming year, and that it was always a good deal more than half an act. Poor Quirrell was inherently a very sharp young man. At the end of the year, with his body failing and his will completely overwritten by that of his master, Quirrell finally discarded his stammering wreck impersonation and revealed his true nature to be cool-headed, clever and, above all, competent. Young Percy's admiration may well have had some basis.



The capture, enslavement, and death of young Professor Quirrell is one of the series's unacknowledged tragedies. And at the very least it is a tragedy on the same level as the murder of Cedric Diggory. This is one of the issues of morality upon which Rowling seems to have thoroughly fumbled the ball. She has never given open acknowledgment that Quirrell's death even was a tragedy, nor that it is yet another of the crimes to be laid to Voldemort's account. This was her very first book, so perhaps allowances may be made at the time. But she has had ample time to point it out since then either in subsequent books or in her interviews, and she hasn't. Clearly, Quirrell was never



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actually “real” to her.

Before the publication of HBP, when we learned that the DADA position really *is* jinxed, I had already chosen to take a stand and say that although we never heard about the DADA position being jinxed before year 2, there had probably been a string of 1-year holders of the post, of which Quirrell was only the latest. In this case, if his sabbatical year to gain experience in the field was the year before Harry started at Hogwarts, then the year that he actually held the position before would have been the year before that. Which would have been the academic year of 1989-90. (Possibly not coincidentally, this would have been the Weasley twins’ first year at Hogwarts.)

Given the difficulty that Dumbledore was having staffing the position, Quirrell’s DADA appointment — the original one that is, may have been arranged a while in advance. It is not out of line to suppose that one of the earlier holders of the position — or, as we now must also consider; Horace Slughorn, in retirement — may have chosen to pull a few strings.

Or, simplest of all: Quirrell heard of the opening through the conventional channels, applied for it on the strength of his DADA NEWT and some years of independent theoretical study, was accepted, and teaches it for a year, doing a perfectly competent job up to May or June. As always, however, something unforeseen comes up. This turns out to be a situation where his lack of practical experience is a serious, possibly dangerous, disadvantage. He or a student might even be injured as a result. Quirrell announces that he is taking a year to get the sort of experience in the field that might have prevented the occurrence, and is willing to try again. All three of the accounts

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we have, from Hagrid, Percy, and even Voldemort make it sound very much as though Quirrell had already been a teacher before he took his ultimately fatal sabbatical.

One of my own early suspicions was that Dumbledore had steadfastly refused to hire as an instructor for this position anyone who has a known history of being a Dark wizard. This reading no longer really plays. Admittedly, it might have explained some of his difficulty in staffing the post, and it certainly offered a “public” reason for his reluctance to give the position to Severus Snape, but it simply does not play. The Dark Arts may not be a formal study offered at Hogwarts, but the study is neither illegal nor even socially taboo. Albus himself would appear to have had more than a passing understanding of the Dark Arts, himself, and Snape’s expertise in Dark magic is a resource that Albus all too clearly regarded as highly useful in an emergency.

Nevertheless, Quirrell, a young man trained under his own eye at Hogwarts would have been a perfect fit for the profile of Dumbledore’s preferred type of instructor for this class.



In any case, we can still extrapolate that Quirrell holds the position the expected single year, and then goes off on sabbatical and performs very well in the field. So well, in fact, that he is distinctly over-confident by the time he gets to Albania (which by this time is sounding like a popular wizarding holiday destination. *Everyone* seems to go there) and decides to investigate the tales of a forested area where, over the past decade, there have been reports of beasts, particularly snakes, which

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exhibit ominously unbeastly behavior.

I tend to see young Professor Quirrell as Percy Weasley's "shadow twin," much in the way that Harry and his friends sometimes appear to echo the Marauders. Very bright, very upright, very conscious of his own good intentions, very, very good at going by the book and following all the rules of how things are "supposed" to work — and completely out of his depth if he comes up against something that doesn't bloody *care* about rules.

The toxic levels of "hatred, greed and ambition" about which Dumbledore disparaged QuirrellMort probably did not originate with young Professor Quirrell. But, then, by this time we have seen it amply demonstrated that Albus Dumbledore rather consistently blames victims for their own defeat. And the passive support of and obedience to his Master that was demonstrated by Quirrell at the end of the book were the result of his will having been completely overwritten and devoured by that of his Master. He was owned to his very soul, by his conqueror. This was our first glimpse of a man spellbound by the effects of something in the Imperius class of totally controlling magic. We did not have the context to recognize it at the time. We do now.

And it is horrifying.

I have become more and more convinced that the Imperius Curse was developed as a means for a wizard who does not naturally have the ability to do so to take possession of another living creature by means of a spell. It is small wonder that it is classified as unforgivable.

What Quirrell did not know, and so couldn't warn his Master

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of was that Dumbledore had probably long kept some form of monitoring on Voldemort's refuge in Albania to take note of and report any wizards who might enter that part of the forest. (This surveillance may be accomplished through a trusted agent, or by one of the mysterious instruments in his office. Quite possibly one whose transmitter was originally placed there by Fawkes.) This monitoring had been going on for years, quite possibly since not long after Voldemort's first defeat at Godric's Hollow, and Tom's prior Albanian connections were discovered. When Quirrell went into the forest and came out haunted and faintly twitching, Dumbledore was informed with little delay.

And even failing that likelihood, he would still have been made fully aware that Quirrell had somehow been "got at" as soon as he came face to face with him. There was never any mystery on Dumbledore's side regarding who was serving as Voldemort's agent at Hogwarts.



The real question regarding the adventure of the Philosophers' Stone is why it ever was set up the way it was. That the whole charade was set up as a trap, is obvious to any reader. But since we see everything from Harry's point of view it is not so glaringly obvious that in the normal way of things, there was no reason whatsoever for the Philosophers' Stone to have ever been brought to the school.

Particularly now that Albus tells us in HBP that during his first rise, Voldemort had dismissed the option of extending his life by way of stealing Flamel's Stone, or of attempting to create one himself.

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Note: the plan to bring the Stone to Hogwarts had to have been announced to the staff some time before the Stone was actually brought to the school, in order for the labyrinth to be created to guard it. Voldemort, who had already enslaved, but we are forced to accept the reading that he had not yet completely possessed Quirrell (primarily because Rowling was so careless as to have Quirrell shaking Harry's hand without ill effects when Hagrid introduces them in the Leaky Cauldron early in the book, and nobody at Bloomsbury caught it), learned of it and ordered Quirrell to make his attempt on Gringotts to see if he could nip in and get it ahead of Hagrid.

That Quirrell was still able to shake Harry's hand at that point without harm to either of them (although he had already adopted the stammering wreck persona), was something for which Rowling's continuity editor needed to be slapped. In retrospect, it comes across as sloppy plotting. Rowling is often shaky on the concept that what is stated in one book really ought to still comply with what we learn in subsequent books, or, for that matter, ought to comply with matters as they stand at both ends of the *same* book. In this case, the disconnect comes back to bite us before the book is finished. We'd probably be better off simply dismissing the issue than attempting contortions to try to make both statements work.

What I suspect the Hogwarts staff's objective at this point might have been — in addition to rescuing Quirrell, and capturing Voldemort if they could — was to distract Voldemort from setting any of his *other* suspected goals in motion.

Dumbledore (and I would have thought most of the rest of his senior staff — although Rowling does not seem to agree

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with me) already knew that Quirrell had been got at and overpowered by Voldemort. Dumbledore and his closest colleagues probably also knew that if Voldemort had actually physically *possessed* Quirrell, then they were engaged in a race against time before the body he was possessing failed.

I suspect that Dumbledore may have also believed that according to the parameters of the Trelawney Prophecy he had no hope of actually destroying Voldemort at this time. That they must content themselves with capturing and neutralizing him. From his statement at the end of the book, he claims to think that repeatedly blocking the Dark Lord's return was in itself a sufficient goal to attempt to maintain.

By this time it must have been fairly widely known in the ww that Lord Voldemort had originally been seeking immortality. He had boasted of it to his followers, and their testimony had been recorded whenever there had been an arrest. Consequently, particularly in his current, rather precarious condition, Dumbledore gambled that waving the Philosophers' Stone in his face like bait might well prove to be irresistibly attractive. Getting QuirrellMort to assist in setting up the series of challenges guarding the Stone might give him a false sense of security and keep him concentrated on capturing the Stone rather than, say, regrouping his followers, or directing too much of his attention to his unfinished business with the Potter child, who was expected to arrive at the school with the upcoming term.

And, if they could manage to trap Voldemort quickly enough, they might be able to affect a rescue of their young colleague. That's something else I don't see anyone bringing up.

They were dealing with a hostage situation.

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The Labyrinth of Challenges also constituted a *rescue attempt*. One that *failed*.

Hopes of such a conclusion must have faded as the school year progressed. And with the death of the first unicorn, Dumbledore knew that Voldemort had effectively killed his hostage and it was too late.



Indeed, Dumbledore must have been waiting for an attempt on the Stone to be made at any point after Hagrid showed up with that dragon's egg. I am absolutely convinced that Dumbledore knew all about Norbert. That transaction with the hooded stranger had taken place in the Hog's Head under Albus's own brother's eye, for heaven's sake. (And I am not convinced that Hagrid wasn't coached to let the information of how to get past Fluffy escape, in that exchange. The whole point was to get QuirrellMort *into* the Labyrinth, where he could be *trapped*, after all.) And Albus certainly knew about the dragon once it had hatched. If the children hadn't managed to talk Hagrid into sending Norbert away, he would soon have intervened himself. Canon Hagrid, after all, *does* live in a wooden hut, and keeping a dragon is *illegal*. Particularly if you are doing it on the grounds of a *school*.

Voldemort, however, may not be altogether sane but he is not altogether stupid (or, he wasn't at that point of the series, anyway). Nor is he always reckless. All too often he is cautious to a fault. And he knows a trap when he sees one. So long as he had Quirrell as a hostage, he could be confident that he would not be harmed. He suspected that Dumbledore was aware of



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at least part of what was going on. What he could not be sure of was just how far Dumbledore had taken the rest of the staff into his confidence. Dumbledore has a history of playing his cards very close to his vest.

I think that the Heads of House who had also contributed to the protections on the Stone may have known the whole of it and played dumb in order not to give the game away. Or at any rate, they *would* have done so in a series where grown-ups act like grown-ups. The more junior members of the staff may have honestly been expecting any attack to come from outside the School. If they were aware of anything at all.

As the school year progressed, the waiting game between Dumbledore and Voldemort must have become nerve-wracking for everyone concerned. I imagine that Dumbledore quite shamelessly used all those owls asking for advice and assistance from the new-at-his-job Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, as an excuse to make frequent absences from the school in attempts to tempt QuirrellMort into making his move. (A bit more on that issue in the following essay related to the following year.) And the arranged confrontation between Snape and Quirrell in the Forbidden forest mid-way through the Autumn term was an additional goad intended to spur QuirrellMort to action by convincing him that another prospective thief was also after the prize. All of their efforts were aimed at convincing Voldemort to make his attempt before the year ended, and the School was vacated (which I think had been Voldemort's own intention if his host's body could be made to last that long).

I very much suspect that either the alleged Ministry owl that "lured" Dumbledore away during the two weeks of examinations



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in June was by pre-arrangement, or, just possibly, a fabrication altogether. The Trio's panicky report to Professor McGonagall that "Snape is after the Philosophers' Stone!" was a welcome bit of news, which Minerva must have immediately relayed to Dumbledore in order for him to have returned so fortuitously.

This head's-up was no doubt accomplished by way of the unique magical communication method peculiar to the Order of the Phoenix, that of sending one's Patronus to indicate that one needs assistance. If it was within her power, she would have also warned him of the danger that Potter and his friends might follow QuirrellMort into the Labyrinth in an attempt to protect the Stone. He does seem to already have that information before returning to the castle and encountering Ron and Hermione on their way out of the labyrinth in search of help.

The certain knowledge on the part of the senior staff — that Voldemort was present in the school from the beginning of the year — would add some additional shading to those careful ambiguities regarding Snape's words and actions over the course of the year. Despite Rowling's later determination to undermine her own story, Snape *ought* to have known from Albus that he was dealing with his old Master, and he to be very careful to say or do nothing that year which would unequivocally mark him as being on anyone's "side" apart from his own.

How successful he was remained undetermined until the fifth book in the series. But the indications are that if Snape did not convince Voldemort of his absolute loyalty to himself, in Year 1, he certainly managed to deflect any permanent suspicion that he might by then have been loyal to Dumbledore. From HBP, we learned that with the removal of Lucius Malfoy

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from the game board, Snape has succeeded to Malfoy's (presumed) former place as "most favored follower."



Snape and Dumbledore also probably had *something* planned concerning that Gryffindor/Hufflepuff match which Snape refereed. We do not know whether this was in case there was a threatened repeat of the broom hexing incident, or if there was some other skit intended to offset the appearance of Snape having voluntarily attempted to rescue Potter in the last one. When Potter "got in the way" and the match ended prematurely Snape's disgust was made comically obvious. Snape was also forced to move on to his pre-arranged confrontation in the forest without part of his intended "groundwork" in place.



I also believe that Snape took a much more grudging part in yet another of Albus's little performances on Harry's behalf during year 1. And this one did segue into a clear piece of favoritism on Dumbledore's part, one of perhaps several that Harry was not aware of, but which go at least a small way towards explaining Snape's continuing resentment of the boy.

But it didn't start out as a piece of favoritism. I'm sure that Albus considered it an absolutely necessary step. One upon which most of his future plans depended.

This incident was that odd little sequence on the evening of Christmas day wherein Snape and Filch effectively "herded" Harry (in James's invisibility cloak) into the room where the Mirror of Erised was set up and waiting for him.

The Quirrell Debacle

Dumbledore was taking a tremendous risk in showing Harry how the Mirror of Erised worked. True, by that point he was 99% certain that he understood what Harry was made of, and that it was only Quirrell who had been possessed by the entity that they had known as Lord Voldemort. Particularly after the broom hexing incident the month before.

And “set-up” is the correct term for that whole episode. If the Mirror was Dumbledore’s final “challenge” to get to the hidden Stone, then its “proper place” that year was in the heart of the Labyrinth, not some unused room down the hall from the library.

So, what was it doing there over the Christmas holidays?

It was a test.

For Harry.

Harry seems to believe that because he survived the labyrinth, that the labyrinth had been offered to him as a test. He is wrong. The labyrinth was intended as a trap for Voldemort. Harry was not wanted there and would have done much better to have kept away. All Harry’s messing with the labyrinth did was to remove the Stone from the Mirror prematurely, and to endanger it more than it had been already.

Harry’s test was the Mirror of Erised.

Albus had not yet risked confronting the boy himself. And he did not intend to do so until he knew what he was dealing with.

Albus remembered the full text of the Trelawney Prophecy perfectly well, and he is old enough and clever enough to have realized that for the Dark Lord to have marked this boy “as his equal” was no guarantee that the boy was Tom’s opposite. Or that he would be on Albus’s “side.”



The Quirrell Debacle

And while up to DHs one could still theorize that Albus may have had a soft spot for young Dark wizards, he had no soft spot for Tom Riddle, and by now we all know that he had grave suspicions about the nature of Harry’s scar.

So he needed to know what he was dealing with. He needed to know whether this was another fledgling version of Tom. He needed to know what the boy was made of.

He needed to know what the boy *wanted*.

Well, he had a perfect tool at hand to discover that, didn’t he?

It was a test on several levels. First, would the boy *share* the discovery of the mirror, or would he keep it to himself, as Tom would have done? How would seeing his heart’s desire affect him? What was the boy’s heart’s desire?

Harry passed his test with flying colors. He was fascinated by what the vision the Mirror showed him, but not smug or gloating, he brought Ron to see it too, and they discussed what it was they each saw.

And, as a reward, Albus came forward and opened negotiations with him.



I am convinced that Dumbledore deliberately had the Mirror moved to that room (without Quirrell’s knowledge) during the Christmas break for a reason. And the most likely reason was to find out just what motivated Harry Potter. But Albus had a secondary reason, too, and that was the matter covered by Harry’s “reward.” Dumbledore knew that if they managed to keep QuirrellMort from capturing the Stone — which seemed likely — then at the end of the adventure, they would need to



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retrieve the Stone from the Mirror. And, given that Dumbledore now regarded the Stone as a danger to everybody for as long as it continued to exist, and knowing something of his own nature, he suspected that he would not be able to retrieve it himself. He knew that even if he didn't see himself using it, he would probably only be able to see himself destroying it.

Consequently, somebody else, preferably a student, whose personal responsibilities extended no farther than to make a good performance in his studies, might more readily be motivated to form a desire to simply "find" the Stone rather than to form a wish to "use" it. Particularly if finding it, in itself, was presented as a challenge. Almost any student might have served for this purpose. But, having passed his test of character, Albus chose Harry to be that student.

Once Dumbledore had given the boy a chance to get a good look at what the Mirror would do, he came forward and gave him the necessary coaching to enable him to understand how the Mirror worked. After this interview he had the Mirror moved back into the labyrinth before QuirrellMort realized that it had been shifted.



Retrieving the Stone from the Mirror after the shouting was over was probably the extent of Dumbledore's plans for Harry in regards to the adventure of the Philosopher's Stone. He never intended for Harry and his friends to risk their lives by following QuirrellMort into the Labyrinth. He admits as much when he tells Harry, at the end of OotP, that Harry found himself confronting Voldemort far earlier than Albus had ever anticipated.



The Quirrell Debacle

The kids' raid on the Labyrinth nearly upset all of Dumbledore's plans to a fatal degree. Voldemort came very close to capturing the Stone, and that would not have happened but for Harry's meddling. There is no way that either Quirrell or Voldemort could have gotten that Stone out of the Mirror by themselves.

I suspect that Hagrid's Christmas gift of the wooden flute had not been in Dumbledore's plans, either, and I doubt that he knew about it. I am inclined to think that Hagrid may have simply hoped that Harry might like to eventually make friends with Fluffy.

It also finally clicked for me on just why Harry's plunging into the labyrinth to save the Stone finally won Albus's heart.

Albus may have had grave suspicions of the nature of Harry's scar, but he still didn't know about the scar's active connection between Harry and Tom. Not until Harry woke up in the hospital wing and told him about it afterward. All Albus saw was a kid with James's face, his flying skills and Lily's eyes. Plus the fact that he had made a friend of Ron Weasley (and a rival of Malfoy). Which, in the main, were all good signs. You don't get much more "ordinary" than the Weasleys.

But Albus does know about the nature of Horcruxes, and he would have expected a child who had been turned into one to have shown some effect from it.

But Harry braving the Labyrinth clinched it. Even though that action was completely wrong-headed and unnecessary, even though it turned out that there *was* a connection to Tom, Harry's act of throwing himself into danger to save the Stone from Tom was absolutely convincing evidence that Tom was



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not working through this kid. In fact, you would have had to search long and hard to find anything *less* like Tom's childhood behavior than to go courting danger for no personal gain.



The news that Harry had entered the Labyrinth in pursuit of the Stone must have been highly unwelcome, but it is clear from Dumbledore's reported response to that news that he had already considered it a possibility. Or that Minerva McGonagall (or even Snape) had already alerted Albus to the kids' unwelcome interest in the matter at the same time that he was informed that QuirrellMort had finally taken the bait.

That when found, Harry and Voldemort were discovered to be locked in mortal combat seems to have cleared Harry of any lingering suspicion of being a willing tool of the enemy, regardless of whatever else he might be. It was now solidly established that to the entity which knew itself as Voldemort (VaporMort at that point in the series), Harry Potter was still nothing more than the child that he wanted dead.

It also seems to have completely eliminated from all of Albus's future calculations that the fact that Harry had been marked as Tom's "equal" could potentially be regarded as a threat to anyone else.

However, it also became clear from the boy's statements after he regained consciousness that there *was* indeed *some* kind of connection between the two of them. At any rate it was clear that the boy was able to sense Voldemort's presence.

But Dumbledore was not further inclined to regard Harry with suspicion.



The Quirrell Debacle



Harry's impression that Dumbledore deliberately arranged things so that he could make the raid on the Labyrinth as a "test" is almost certainly in error. Harry sincerely believes it. But then Harry also sincerely believed that Snape was trying to kill him and was after the Stone himself.

Indeed, if Harry and his friends had managed to restrain themselves. Dumbledore's plan might have gone through pretty much as intended. Voldemort and his hostage would have been stuck before the Mirror, ready to be captured red-handed, unless they had the presence of mind to abandon the scene without the Stone. Which Dumbledore had cannily realized was very unlikely.

At that point of the series we had not yet taken Dumbledore's measure. What at that point had *appeared* to be clear to me was that if Dumbledore had a besetting weakness as a strategist (or perhaps I mean a tactician), it is his refusal to confront an opponent merely upon the basis of suspicion. As well as a reluctance to get involved at all, although he *can* be pressured into it.

In every possible instance over the first half of the series, he had appeared to be determined to capture any wrong-doers in the very act, before witnesses, under circumstances where the burden of proof is beyond question. This worked against his interests in both Book 1 *and* Book 4, and even in Book 5 one is left with the impression that his giving way to the Ministry's pressure over the Dumbledore's Army business could not have been his only option.



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If Quirrell had been taken into custody as soon as he returned to the school there may have been a way to save him. But Voldemort would have unquestionably escaped.

At that point in the series he would probably have merely returned to the Albanian forest, and never made contact with any of his followers, and we would all *still* have been waiting for that shoe to fall until Book 4. Voldemort's absence would have had no effect at all upon the actions of Books 2 & 3.

And Quirrell would be alive, and probably aligned with the Light.

Chalk up another casualty to the Headmaster's unfortunate decision to "spare Harry." List Quirrell's name right above those of Cedric Diggory and Sirius Black. And add the names of both Crouches in parenthesis. And, in the list of actual volunteers, mark down Nicholas and Perinelle Flamel.



The Year of the Basilisk

This particular piece explores some possibilities which should no longer be particularly surprising, given that it's been online in one iteration or another since **at least** 2004, and I'm reasonably certain that it was a part of the original essay collection which was uploaded at the end of April, 2003.

It has had any number of later iterations in light of later canon since then, of course.

And it has a lot more to do with the aims and motivations of Lucius Malfoy (and his House Elf) than it does with the poor Basilisk, who just wanted a good dinner.



Something thing that seems clear to just about every reader is that Book 3 and Book 4 are set up as two parts of a closely integrated internal story arc.

Book 1 and Book 2 also show signs of being two halves of a single tale. And, for the record; on my first reading, Book 5 had much of the same feel of being the first part of another internal 2-part sequence. I was inclined to regard it as only half of the story, expecting the other half to be given us in HBP.

Well. Silly me. Instead, after GoF Rowling appears to have started each book with a blank slate and a checklist, and went roaring off in an entirely different direction each time. Even when she told us publicly she was going to be doing otherwise.

Raise your hand anyone who feels that HBP and DHs really did read like two halves of the same story — as Rowling *claimed* they were.

Not you either, eh? And yet that's exactly what she *told* us it

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was supposed to be. I guess she must have “changed her mind” in yet another of those off-the-map abandonments of her original intentions, because that is absolutely not what she gave us.



To be honest, OotP really did open like a reasonable continuation of the story we had been given up to that point, although there had already been a major shift in the ambiance and presentation of it. But HBP seems to have come out of nowhere, ignoring almost every issue raised and flagged as important in OotP, and DHs came out of an entirely *different* nowhere ignoring, or blatantly contradicting just about everything established about every issue or character that figured in HBP — including the growing maturity of the audience. It’s like Rowling was trying to rewrite the 5th book three different times. And got farther afield with each attempt.

In OotP, the real action was out in the ww and more or less in the hands of Albus Dumbledore, rather than Harry Potter. Much the same can be said for HBP. We never got the story of Dumbledore’s own activities over the course of either of these books. And it was only assumed that whatever bits of the information were necessary to solving the underlying problem would eventually turn up in the final one.

Instead, in DHs we were palmed off with the “mystery” of young Albus’ activities 100 years earlier. None of which had *anything* to do with solving Harry’s current problems. In fact, all it did was try to *distract* us from them.

And yet Rowling had already demonstrated that she *can* tie her books together neatly. She’d done it for us over the whole



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first half of the series.

For all that Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s/Sorcerer’s Stone appears to be a self-contained adventure, at the end of the story there are a number of only lightly concealed loose ends left dangling, and these particular loose ends somehow all manage to be picked up, all too readily, in Chamber of Secrets.

Not that CoS didn’t start with a bit of a lurch, on its own. This wasn’t immediately obvious, since like PS/SS it shares the exuberant “Let’s pretend!” quality of so many classic children’s books. But whereas in PS/SS Rowling took *just* enough time to set the basic situation up and ease us into it, in CoS we get dumped right into the first stages of an adventure that is already in progress, with no real explanation for what is going on. And the introduction to the situation at hand that we are initially given fails to ever quite add up or sort itself out. Looking back, I think there is a great deal of missed opportunity here.



In retrospect, the worst of my problems with CoS is that you have to do way too many backbends to get to the starting point. What precisely was this “plot” that Dobby allegedly overheard that had him trying to stop Harry’s mail and keep him out of the Wizarding world? It really can’t have been a plot specifically aimed against Ginny Weasley. Was Dobby even aware that anyone named Ginny Weasley existed? Would he have *cared*?

It isn’t even likely to have been a plot against Arthur. What does Dobby care about the Weasleys? These are people his masters despise. Even if Dobby dislikes and disapproves of his masters, it doesn’t automatically follow that he is going to like



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or wish to support just *anyone* his masters dislike. And what the hell has Harry Potter to do with any of it?

“Oh, because,” really just doesn’t fly.

And yet we never really get that gap in the underlying motivations definitively plugged. Admittedly, this is a continuing problem all through the series and it only got worse after the editors abandoned their post, but it was already fully in play here. The characters’ actions and events are all reasoned backwards. People do things in chapter 2 because Rowling wants them at a certain point in chapter 14, without giving them any motivation or justification to be there. Or, not one that actually works. And the ones which she pastes on are usually the shallowest and shoddiest she thinks she can get away with.

In this case, the real question is why is Dobby at #4 at all? I mean, yes, sure, we are going to need him later, and need to know who he is. But the justification we’re given for why he’s there *now* doesn’t work. Frankly, I thought the whole business with the pudding was stupid, but I’m just a boring old grown-up, so you can ignore my opinions on that. I guess the kids reading the book may have enjoyed it, since a grand “splat!” generally plays very well as a punchline in kid logic. But it really doesn’t seem to be the best return for the effort to me, and it doesn’t contribute anything worth having to the rest of the adventure.

I’ve stated elsewhere that I think Rowling is far too ready to dispense with plausibility in favor of broad comedy, and I don’t think that this example made the book stronger. The Dursleys’ over-the-top reaction of locking Harry in his room and starving him (and Hedwig!) was perfectly in keeping with the exaggerations of the first book, but I’m not convinced it made for

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good plotting. And the whole thing could have been inspired by something less obtrusive and pointless. Dragging the Ministry’s oversight into the situation at this stage of the series only added confusion, since by the time she really *needed* to deploy Ministry interference Rowling had changed all the rules. It would have made a lot more sense for any Ministry notice to have been sparked by some bit of accidental magic that Harry actually *did* (and for doing which he already had a long history) which would have still given away the fact that now that he was a Hogwarts student, he was not *supposed* to be doing magic at home, and would still make a nice contrast to the situation when Harry blew up his aunt the following summer and the Ministry swept it all under the rug.

That said, I will admit that the Weasley rescue was fun and set us up nicely for Ron and Harry stealing the car later. But Harry could still have been locked in after the Dursleys discovered that his own Ministry of Magic wanted him kept under control, and have been rescued via the flying Anglia anyway.

This same sort of problem applies when Dobby finally shows up with Lucius Malfoy at the final confrontation. The true reason he is there is to collect his reward, and to make it sure that everyone knows who his master is, and who was behind that year’s uproar. But it isn’t ever explained why he is there inside the story. I understand that in the original Bloomsbury edition, he was simply there without even the excuse of being in the middle of polishing Lucius’s shoes while he was wearing them. That was an addition on the part of the editorial team at Scholastic, and at least sort-of makes a believable excuse for it.

If the book hadn’t been aimed quite so solidly at the kiddie

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end of the market, and Rowling had chosen to amp up the mystery/suspense element of the story, we might have had Harry catch a glimpse of Dobby at #4, or even at the Burrow, and not know who (or *what*) he was. In fact, Harry might have caught a glimpse of Dobby more than once, *without* Dobby actually confronting Harry, confessing to stealing his mail, or making wild speeches about mysterious plots.

However, by this time, *I* believe that — *inside* the story — Dobby had been ordered to watch Harry and to tell his master when Harry was going to be in Diagon Alley to buy his school supplies. (And Dobby would have *let* himself be glimpsed. You do not see an Elf unless he wants you to) In that case, Harry would even have caught a glimpse of Dobby at the Weasleys' (since Dobby would *still* be watching him) and we could let the twins' explain what a House Elf is *then*.

It might have made for a satisfactory mystery/suspense element if we just plain didn't know what Dobby was all about, and Dobby *hadn't* come forth to wibble about the terrible "plot," moan about his horrible masters, and make it clear that he was actually on Harry's side until after the rogue bludger incident. But none of this would have been conducive to the slapstick comedy that Rowling preferred at this point in the series.

As it is, we are left with a cartload of questions.



For example; just what is up with Dobby's involvement with Harry Potter over the summer holidays?

By almost anyone's standards, the first chapter of CoS gives us an amazing glimpse of tangled motives, non-communication,

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and mysterious cross-purposes regarding Dobby's interference with, and warnings to Harry Potter.

In the first place, almost the minute that school is out, he takes up his post to stop the kid's mail. This is a kid he has never met. How did he even find out where Harry lived?

Never mind that, there are other matters even more worthy of confusion here.

He steals the boy's mail. He stops — and intercepts — Harry's mail for several weeks before he finally reveals himself to deliver his warning.

Just how actively can he have been hovering around Privet Drive monitoring the mail, and still all the while be holding down his "day job" without this activity being discovered by his Masters? Or is that even an issue? For that matter, what if it's a *clue*? In the mystery/suspense scenario given above, it *would* have been a clue. His masters would have *ordered* him to be there. (In point of fact, I think that Lucius *had*.)



And what about that warning, in and of itself?

The actual content of the warning seems pretty clearly to have been Dobby's own axe to grind. But as things stand, from all we have been told about the multiple constraints on the actions of House Elves, getting that message delivered must have taken some maneuvering on Dobby's part.

Dobby is supposed to have known of the Malfoy/Riddle plot, at least to the extent that it involved Tom Riddle rather than the current iteration of Lord Voldemort — and how would Dobby know *that*? (Backstory? Fugeddaboutit!) but Dobby

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does not have the authority to contact Harry on his own initiative. And for that matter, from this end of the series, it is clear that Lucius Malfoy was *not* plotting with Tom Riddle about turning the Diary loose. He did that without orders (indeed, *against* orders) off his own bat.

Lucius Malfoy has authority to burn in his own household, but if he was spearheading the plot, he would not willingly have given Harry Potter the slightest hint that anything was up.

It was the Weasley twins who suggested that it was Draco who sent Dobby to try to frighten Harry off from returning to Hogwarts. Harry certainly accepts that explanation, but at first glance this sounds a bit overly fortuitous to me. And the warning itself never overtly came from any of the Malfoys.

Upon consideration, however, that explanation would just *about* answer (in the dark, with the light behind it, if you squint). Although I am no longer convinced of it, myself.

Lucius Malfoy is not about to share important plans regarding his more Byzantine intrigues with a whiny 12-year-old. But Draco, as the son of the house, does at least have the authority to send Dobby on errands.

So, just how cunning *is* Dobby?

Because he is clearly pulling the wool over somebody's eyes. Quite possibly everybody's eyes. Certainly over Harry's.

With the very *best* of motives, of course.

Probably.



Dobby clearly seems to ascribe to the "Harry Potter is the savior of the Wizarding World" persuasion, regardless of who



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his employers are. In fact, from everything he has ever said on the subject, his working and living conditions in the Malfoy household were discernibly worse during the last years of Voldemort's rise than they have been since that point. An improvement that he publicly credits as being due to Harry Potter.

From this, it is not difficult to conclude that Voldemort may have spent a fair amount of time at Malfoy Manor being the houstguest from Hell during the years of VoldWar I. Which would suggest that Lucius's father, Abraxus Malfoy was also a supporter, even if not necessarily a marked Death Eater.

Why else would Dobby ascribe any improvement in his lot with Harry Potter? The Malfoy's House Elf is the Malfoy's House Elf. We've heard nothing about any sort of oversight regarding the treatment of House Elves by their own Masters (or their Masters' guests). Either by Voldemort or the Ministry. Regardless of who might be in power at the time.

If anything, the major change at Malfoy Manor in the last years of Voldemort's first rise would have been Lucius Malfoy's marriage to Narcissa Black (whose family's House Elves seem to have been devoted to *their* Masters) and the birth of Draco. And we cannot even be sure of the date of that change for we have no information on just when Lucius married, although it would have been before the autumn of '79, since his son was born in June of 1980.

For that matter, we don't know who Lucius's mother's family was or just when she died, either. Draco has never mentioned a grandmother.

All we have is a lot of soft soap from Dobby expounding upon his gratitude to Harry Potter.



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Dobby, by his own admission, also claims to have been aware of Lucius's plans regarding Harry Potter "for months," i.e., some time before the school year of book 1 had ended. But there would appear to be no way that he could contact the boy or give him any kind of warning within the boundaries of his "contract" with the Malfoy family, even now. To do any such thing is betraying his Masters' secrets.

So, could Dobby have seized the opportunity to lead a conversation to the point that *Draco* ordered him to keep Potter from returning to Hogwarts?

That's about the only solution that fits the twins' explanation, or at least the only one that meets all the requirements according to any information we were ever given on the subject. And we are not likely to get any more.

It would certainly have been easy enough to accomplish. All Dobby would have needed to do would have been to ask young "master Draco" in all faux-innocence if he had met the great Harry Potter at Hogwarts, and, after enduring the ensuing tirade, to have timidly asked whether master Draco "is wanting Dobby to keep Harry Potter from returning to Hogwarts?" Servants have been manipulating masters for a *looong* time, after all.

But I no longer buy that explanation.

Dobby was hovering around Privet Drive for much too long and for too much of the time not to have been there under *real* orders.

From *Lucius* Malfoy.

Say what?



Because I am pretty sure that my explanation as presented

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in the mystery/suspense extrapolation above was right. Dobby had been ordered to watch Harry.

And, now we're back to the \$64,000 question: Just what exactly was this mysterious "plot" that had Dobby's pillowslip all in a twist? Explain to me just why on earth Dobby would suddenly be desperately trying to warn Harry away from Hogwarts over a threat to Ginny Weasley, who Dobby has probably never heard of, and Harry has never properly met?

Unless that threat — in its original form — wasn't to Ginny Weasley at all.

Uh huh.

That's right.

I think that, despite Pharnabazus's excellent canon-compliant extrapolation, and Rowling's determined lack of acknowledgment, it is far more likely to have been *Harry* who was originally intended to be given the Riddle Diary.

It was Harry who was supposed to be possessed by the Diary's Reverent. It was *Harry* who was supposed to open the Chamber of Secrets; *Harry* who was to set the Basilisk loose on the School; and it was Harry who was supposed to exchange his life for that of young Tom Riddle.

Nothing else to this point makes such *complete* sense.



And, now that we know something about Horcruxes, that prospect raises considerable curiosity over what on earth would have happened if Lucius had succeeded in passing the diary to Harry. Given that Harry already had custody of another one of the set! Would the two fragments have reacted to one another?

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Well, from what we were shown in CoS, they did not react at all. Harry's scar didn't even give a twitch over the young Tom Riddle. I now wonder whether that was an oversight on Rowling's part, and an unfortunate result of her determination to suppress evidence that we were going to actually need later, or an attempt at a clue that didn't quite come off, since it doesn't seem to lead us anywhere. That scar really *ought* to have reacted to the Revenant. And probably to the Diary as well.

On the other end of the equation we have the question: why would Lucius Malfoy choose *that* particular moment to suddenly deploy the Riddle Diary in the first place? Followed by the question of what, and who, did Dobby actually overhear, when he claims to have known about the plot "for months"?

Or was he referring to Lucius's orders *to him*?

Lucius knew exactly what year Potter was going to be starting Hogwarts. Why should he feel that it would be any easier to approach the boy at the beginning of his second year, rather than his first, or his third, or any other year? He has presumably had some of Tom Riddle's personal effects in safekeeping ever since the Dark Lord's defeat. He may know, from Snape, that Dumbledore does not believe that Voldemort is dead (or he might have reconsidered Bellatrix's *absolute* conviction that he would be returning, and decided to admit the possibility). Lucius does not have the authority to make free use of his Master's personal property. Why does he suddenly decide to do it?

What happened off-stage during Harry's first year?



In the wake of the release of the Black family tapestry sketch,

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I thought we may have finally been given a clue on that issue.

I still tend to think so, even though most of the dates in the last couple of lines on that tapestry turn out to be useless, and others have been modified for the films. But let's explore this alleyway a bit further, just in case.

We were told in the course of HBP that Lucius's father, Abraxus Malfoy died in an outbreak of dragon-pox.

Any disease with a name like dragon-pox is liable to be a virulent epidemic. Abraxus Malfoy will not be the only person to have caught it.

From the tapestry — in its original form — we could see that no fewer than four members of the Black family (i.e., every member of the oldest two surviving generations, apart from Callidora Longbottom) died in 1991–1992. i.e., the year that Harry and Draco were in their first year at Hogwarts.

In an outbreak of dragon-pox?

Well, we will probably never be told as much. But it makes as much sense as any other suggestion. And good deal more than some.

I certainly won't insist on it. But there's no telling what was going on at Malfoy Manor between Christmas of Year 1 and the end of the school year in June.

So if Abraxus Malfoy died, early in 1992 in an outbreak of dragon-pox, then the spring and summer before the opening of CoS would be the point at which Lucius Malfoy was finally off his father's leash, and had succeeded him as the Head of the Malfoy family. He might have been discussing his future plans as soon as his father was underground. We don't know with whom. With his wife, if no one else.

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Which raises the question of what he thought that he was playing at by deploying the Diary off his own bat.

How much did Tom tell Lucius about that diary? And when did he do so? Under what circumstances?

We have since been told in HBP that Lucius wasn't given the Diary until shortly before Voldemort's defeat, in 1981.

So, what was the situation in 1981?

Tom had already launched his major campaign against the established wizarding government and the whole country was on the brink of anarchy. The average wizard-in-the-street was convinced that Tom was winning. The Ministry was in disarray. Pettigrew, who had been wavering for the past year, finally put down his chips on Voldemort's side of the board. In the public perception, the last bastion of resistance was probably Albus Dumbledore, and Hogwarts.

Throw a Basilisk into the equation on Albus's turf and what have we got? Tom nearly closed down the school the last time that Basilisk got out.

And Lucius definitely knows at least *something* of that. Because he mentioned it at some point where Draco overheard him.

I do think that by the time Tom was told about the Prophecy, he had been trying for decades to figure out a way in which he could manage to murder Albus Dumbledore and use his death to create the final Horcrux of his planned set of six. And he still hadn't managed to come up with one that came with an acceptably low level of risk.

But with a child of Prophecy on offer, Tom didn't need



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Albus's death for his final Horcrux any more. He could see him dead at long distance, by proxy. And with the school closed, and Albus gone, he could take the castle.

He had always wanted that castle.

He originally also wanted the Sword of Gryffindor, but it's clear that he finally gave that part of his "grand design" up. After all, by the time he did take the castle and the Sword was right there for Snape to hand over, it doesn't sound like he could have been less interested.

But I'm not convinced that back in '81 he necessarily wanted the school.

In '81 he wasn't so likely to have been content to be pulling strings from behind the scenes and pretending that someone else was running things.

I also still think that Snape was originally sent into Hogwarts to serve as an assassin. But clearly there was a bit more to the mission than just killing Dumbledore. Since Tom did pass the Diary to Lucius at exactly the same time that he ordered Snape into Hogwarts, the two acts are unlikely to have been unconnected.

I now believe that Lucius was supposed to hang onto the Diary until Tom had settled the threat of the Potter child (and possibly also the Longbottom child as well), and then, when he was given the signal, he was to pass the Diary to Snape inside the school — who was in turn to deploy it, the Chamber would be opened, Albus was to be murdered under cover of the uproar created by the Basilisk. Possibly even *by* the Basilisk.

Well, it didn't work out that way, did it?



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But that does not mean that Lucius necessarily *knew* about the Basilisk. He knew that the Chamber would be opened. And he knew about a monster, since that is all a part of the legend. But I very much doubt that Tom told him what the monster was. Lucius (unlike Bellatrix) certainly *didn't* know about the Horcrux, or he would have hardly risked it the way he did.

Tom would have told him that the unprepossessing little Muggle Diary was a weapon. And he does appear to have filled him in on the fact that by deploying the Diary, they would open the Chamber of Secrets. I also think that the information that Draco was spouting about Slytherin's monster killing a Muggle-born student was information that Tom had given to Lucius at the same time he had entrusted him with the Diary.

Lucius knew there was a monster. He probably did not know that the monster was a Basilisk. And I am beginning to suspect that what Dobby may have overheard was Lucius's attempts to convince Narcissa to send Draco to Durmstrang for his education. There is no way that Draco would have been spreading the information that the Chamber had been opened once before around the Slytherin common room without having heard (or overheard) of it from Lucius. That isn't something that is widely known. Not even among Slytherins. Not even among Death Eaters. Even the Hogwarts staff (with the exception of Albus, and, well, yes, Hagrid) seems to have remained ignorant of the fact. And Albus didn't tell anyone what he had figured out.

Lucius clearly also seems to have been told that a Muggle-born child had been killed the last time the Chamber was opened. Draco was spreading that story around as well.

And I very much expect that Tom may have told Lucius

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that by deploying the Diary they would be able to get rid of Dumbledore. Who Lucius thinks is probably the very worst Headmaster that Hogwarts could possibly have

Well. Fast-forward to 1992 and Lucius Malfoy is out from under his father's thumb and ready to launch his own bid to be the master of wizarding Britain. He hasn't any objection to getting rid of Dumbledore either, has he?



Only why get rid of Dumbledore? Or, rather, why get rid of Dumbledore *first*?

Surely it wasn't *just* a matter of spite over Albus "cheating" Slytherin out of the House Cup in Draco's first year. Or was it?

It's perfectly obvious over the next two books that Lucius, with an additional decades' worth of maturity behind him since his DE days, wants to control the Ministry, *and* to take command of the remnants of Riddle's organization. But Albus Dumbledore has no official part in either of those.

But he is an interfering old coot that an inconveniently high percentage of the wizarding constituency tend to look to for guidance, and having him out of the picture would open up a *major* power vacuum that someone else might manage to step into.

And, even better, thanks to his departed Master, removing Dumbledore can be accomplished without going head-to-head with the Ministry, or with Albus himself.



He knows that the Diary is a form of weapon. Check.

He knows that by the means of the Diary, the Chamber of

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Secrets will be opened and Slytherin's monster be set loose on the school, and probably manage to finally rid the world of Albus Dumbledore. Check.

He knows, or suspects that the Diary will have a seriously negative impact upon anyone, presumably a child, who is given it. We can't be sure that Tom filled him in on that, but he may well have. At any rate Lucius certainly doesn't risk giving the Diary to his *own* child. He may not know that the child involved will be required to *die*. But if he does he doesn't care. He's rather more concerned that the child involved should be *blamed*.

By the end of Year 1 he also knows, through both Draco and Snape, *something* of the failure of Voldemort's attempt to return. The story was not effectively kept under wraps. The whole castle was buzzing with rumors. So Draco would have given his father at least a garbled account. Lucius would have questioned Snape as to what had actually gone on.

He may even have been told something of the adventure of the Philosophers' Stone, or of Dumbledore's attempts to protect the Stone, and of the attempt to forestall and capture the thief a good deal earlier in the year, under the cover of Snape passing information to one of the school's Governors. But the suspected thief was not identified as Voldemort before the end of the year if that news got out after Harry stormed the Labyrinth.

Snape, who has probably been passing selected information back and forth throughout the years of Voldemort's absence, had his cover to maintain, and part of that required that he pretend to remain ignorant of who they were dealing with. But Malfoy might well have been filled in on the public version, and perhaps rather more than that, once the adventure was over.



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Snape's story would have been much the same as the one he gave Voldemort three years later, that he had not known that it was Voldemort who had been attempting to steal the Stone, he had thought that Quirrell had been acting on his own account.

At the end of the year however it is generally known in select circles that Harry has faced the Dark Lord again and survived. And that Voldemort had been attempting to return. And had failed.

And that the attempt failed may have given Malfoy the green light.

There is a great deal of reason to believe that Malfoy was not overjoyed when Voldemort made his return at the end of GoF. Hearing of his Master's failure to capture the Philosopher's Stone may have led Malfoy into a false confidence that Voldemort would simply not be coming back. Ever.

Leaving the way clear for him.



Perhaps we should also remember that rather disturbing comment of Snape's, early in Book 6, that a certain number of Voldemort's followers believed that Harry Potter's victory over the Dark Lord was an indication that Potter himself was a powerful Dark wizard. One whose standard they could possibly rally around again. Malfoy was apparently one of the ones who had wondered about this.

And when Draco returned from Hogwarts it was with the unwelcome news that he had managed — in complete contradiction to all his father's recommendations — to have alienated Potter.

If Potter is a fledgling powerful Dark wizard, and Draco has made an enemy of him, he is now a threat, rather than a poten-



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tial ally and resource. Lucius does not like having his family threatened.

And, in the meantime, despite the fact that the Dark Arts are not illegal, Malfoy is also suddenly feeling pressure from Ministry raids on the homes of suspected Dark wizards.



Which finally occurs to me as being very odd timing.

The war had been over for a decade. There had no doubt been a considerable flurry of searches on suspected DE homes in the immediate aftermath. But the Dark Arts, in themselves, are not illegal. They are not even universally disapproved of socially. Why is the Ministry suddenly making raids on “suspected Dark wizards” homes *now*?

Pharnabazus makes an excellent argument that this sudden upsurge in investigations of suspected Dark wizards may have been an indication of the timing of Barty Crouch Sr’s removal as the Head of the DMLE and Amelia Bones (who knew nothing about any of Crouch’s “gentlemen’s agreements” with persons like Abraxus Malfoy) sweeping in like a new broom with a public demonstration that she was “doing something.”

Except that Crouch wasn’t removed from his post over any lack of action. By all accounts he was removed because he made much of the Wizengamot uncomfortable with his attempt to keep on fighting a war that they were complacent about having already won.

So why are there suddenly raids on the homes of “suspected Dark wizards”? And who is behind them?

If it had been Malfoy Manor itself which had been searched



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I’d say that Crouch had taken Abraxus’s death as a go ahead to send Lucius a message that all bets were now off. He’d accepted Lucius’s Imperius defense for Abraxus’s sake, and in consideration of keeping his own son’s involvement in the DE movement under wraps. Well, that was no inducement any more, and Crouch had no reason to trust to Lucius’s good behavior once off his father’s leash.

Only, from what Lucius has to say to Borgin, the manor hasn’t been searched yet. And he is getting as many inconvenient items out of it before it might be as possible.

Including the Dark Lord’s Diary.

And isn’t there someone else who might be a possibility for being behind these sudden raids that is being overlooked here?

Cornelius Fudge is the Minister for Magic after all. And he has since shown himself to be both very jealous of any threats to his position, and to be at least vestigially in Albus Dumbledore’s confidence.

Voldemort was almost back, and his followers were just an owl away. And Albus could hardly keep Quirrell/Mort out of the Owlery.

Could Albus have dropped a hint in Fudge’s ear that they might possibly see an increase in Dark Arts activity in the near future? Did Fudge grab the hint and run with it? Is that what all those owls to Albus over the previous year were about?

And what would Crouch have had to say about Fudge interfering in his Department’s authority? Might the ensuing bitch-fight have been what gave the Wizengamot the crowbar they needed to pry Crouch loose and set him to giving grief to wizards abroad instead?



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I rather doubt that we are ever going to be told one way or the other. But it might certainly have given Lucius the kind of heads-up that he needed in order to let him know that he ought to put a certain amount of his attention towards tethering Fudge.



Of course it is just *possible* that Pharnabazus was right and Lucius was discussing the feasibility of deploying the Dark Lord's weapon to one of the Weasley children, to his own advantage, with his wife. Weasley is the fellow behind this wretched Muggle Protection Act. And he is taking part in these annoying raids. But he is too far down the chain of command to be the cause of them.

Pharnabazus does offer a fairly convincing interpretation, but I am not altogether prepared to put a down payment on it. Yet. For one thing it overlooks a couple of questions of my own.

The first, of course is to wonder whether Lucius even knew that Arthur Weasley *had* a daughter. I'm not altogether convinced he did. He may have been a school Governor, but the girl wasn't even in school yet.

Admittedly, Dobby does seem to have been most likely to have overheard a discussion if it was between Lucius and Narcissa. For Dobby does claim to have HEARD Malfoy discussing the matter with *someone*. At the very least, his wife. But I am more and more of the opinion that Dobby is actually redrafting and misrepresenting Lucius's orders to *him*:

It may also have been during this period that Lucius was proposing to send Draco off to Durmstrang so he would be out of

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the way of any harm (even though we do not hear about this proposal from Draco until a couple of years later in GoF), telling Narcissa just enough of his reasons for Dobby to have at least figured out that this was a plot centered on Hogwarts.

If so, Narcissa isn't admitting to remembering anything to do with such a discussion at any point that we've encountered her since.

But from where Dobby was standing; I still think *he* understood very well that it was the great Harry Potter who was being threatened.

I mean, really. Think about it. Why would Dobby have gone gibbering in a panic to Harry Potter over a threat to the life of Ginny Weasley? I ask it again; had Dobby ever even heard of Ginny Weasley? Lucius had probably done any amount of fuming over Arthur, but is unlikely to have gone into detail regarding individual members of the man's family. Once he returned from his first year, Draco may well have groused about the other Weasleys in addition to Harry. But he knows nothing in particular about Ginny. At that point Draco may not even know she exists, either.



So, once more with feeling; why was Dobby lurking around Privet drive?

Well, if Lucius had come up with the bright idea of palming the Diary off to Harry Potter, he would need to know where the kid was, wouldn't he? He would need to know when the boy set off for Diagon Alley, so he would have the opportunity to intercept him.

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I think that not only was Dobby lurking around Privet Drive on Lucius's orders, he went on lurking, invisibly, around the Burrow for the rest of the summer. (And continued tailing them all to King's Cross Station where he got the bright idea to block the barrier to the platform.)

Somebody had to have told Lucius Malfoy what day Potter was going to be in Diagon Alley, didn't they? Do you really think that he ran Harry and the Weasleys down in Flourish & Blotts by *chance*? Regardless of which child he initially intended to give the book to. You really don't get the impression that he was in the habit of toting that book around with him all the time, do you? (Particularly not after the retcon in DHs that has all Horcruxes acting like the One Ring.)

And if *this* is where Lucius was coming from, we sat and watched his plot all go pear-shaped before our very eyes when Muggle-loving Arthur Weasley, instead of going for his wand when taunted — like any self-respecting wizard — threw a punch instead, dragged Lucius into a fist fight in public (in a bookstore which was packed for a celebrity book signing, just to add insult to injury) and so enraged Lucius that he planted the diary on Arthur's daughter (and the apple of his eye, I suspect) instead. Thus furthering his own private agenda to score off of a rival above all else.

Lucius tends to do stupid things as soon as he gets angry.



Or maybe not.

Now that we've got Dobby tailing Harry on Lucius's orders, it opens up another possibility. You do not see a House Elf



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unless he wants you to. Especially when he is taking active measures not to be seen.

It makes a lot less sense for Lucius to be playing parlor tricks and tucking the Diary into Ginny's 2nd hand textbook by slight-of-hand than it would for him to have given the Diary to Dobby and told him to see that it got into the bundle of Harry's books.

Dobby would have taken any opportunity that was offered to be able to disobey *that* order.

So when Lockhart presented Harry with a complete (auto-graphed!) set of his books for school, and Harry dumped the stack into Ginny's new cauldron, along with *her* books, and *Ron's* books, and the cauldron went flying when Lucius and Arthur got into a fist fight, I think Dobby may have made sure that the Diary got into a book in that cauldron that was anyone's book *but* Harry's.



Dumbledore's statements on the subject in HBP strongly indicate that Voldemort did not learn of the loss of the Diary and of the Basilisk until well after he was already committed to co-opting Lucius's plot to take over the Ministry and needed Malfoy alive and well for the sake of his influence upon Fudge, and Fudge's staff.

Or at least one has to suppose that's the only reason that Lucius Malfoy wasn't executed, then and there, with extreme prejudice when Tom did discover it. Not considering just what that Diary was. But Lucius has to have known that the next time he put a foot wrong, he was for it.

Yet it was probably not simply out of anger over the loss of



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one of his precious Horcruxes (just possibly the most precious of them all, because the most potentially useful) that Voldemort put Lucius in charge of the raid on the DoM, a mission for which Lucius's skills are clearly not best suited.

And then lumbered him with Bellatrix for good measure.

Either Malfoy wanted that assignment (to show up Bellatrix?), or somebody had some other axe to grind.

Because Malfoy is just not the kind of person you put in charge of a raid. He's far better utilized behind the scenes, where his authority isn't going to get openly challenged.

For the record, even though he will eagerly punish followers who disappoint him, and ultimately escalated into killing the ones who simply gave him bad news, I do Not believe that in Year 5 Voldemort was in the habit of casually Crucioing just ANY of his followers, arbitrarily. There are some that he knew were much too valuable to give any cause to reconsider their alliance, and thus put him to the trouble of having to kill them before he was finished with them (an act for which he showed a reasonable reluctance until the series went completely off the rails in DHs). But he will certainly torture OTHER, more expendable of their fellows in their presence as a reminder that he COULD. Draco has a point. Until Voldemort discovered the truth about the Diary, Lucius Malfoy was probably EVERY bit as important as Draco boasted that he was. (Except for the rather telling fact that Lucius apparently did NOT have a seat on the Wizengamot.)

Or at least he was important *then*. He certainly wasn't afterwards.

And when the raid started going pear-shaped, you almost have to wonder whether Lucius let himself be captured on purpose.



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Leaving us at a point where we have another loose end dangling. Dobby and the rogue Bludger.

Upon whose authority was Dobby lurking about Hogwarts and messing with that Bludger?

As to Dobby himself; now that we have a little more information to reason from, it is beginning to look like Viktor Krum wasn't our only "good Slytherin" surrogate in the series after all. Because it seems to me as if Dobby was a very sharp little operator, and not at all in the style favored by Gryffindor House. And if House Elves have anything like House affiliations, Dobby was definitely a Slytherin.

The speech patterns of House Elves invite the reader to conclude that their reasoning powers are extremely primitive and that they are fundamentally rather stupid. My own contention is that they reason from an entirely different set of cultural assumptions and according to a whole different system of symbols from that of any human, rendering much of their reasoning unintelligible to human observers.

And upon closer examination, their patois rather starts coming across as something like a dialect of bafflegab.

For another thing, it is obvious that they shade the truth without any hesitation, and they have been manipulating humans for centuries. Dobby's bit of wordplay at the end of CoS that the Dark Lord, before he became the Dark Lord, could be named freely, is surprisingly sophisticated when stacked up against what most wizards appear to believe about the intelligence of House Elves, and of their reasoning capabilities.



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We have also been given what may be a hint when Dumbledore informs Harry that when Harry fire-called #12 and asked for Sirius that Kreacher could lie to him outright without feeling any need to punish himself for having done so, since Harry was not his Master. (Ironically, by the time that conversation with Albus takes place, Harry *is* Kreacher's Master.)

It rather belatedly occurred to me that Harry was not Dobby's Master, either.

If Dobby used his Master's orders to send him to Harry Potter, for all that his warnings were absolutely sincere and absolutely not what his Master intended, and for all that they were unquestionably intended to keep Harry safe, it does not automatically follow that everything, or indeed *anything*, that was stated in, or along with those warnings was necessarily true.

Or, not necessarily true in quite the way that Dobby *implied*.

One thing that is obvious, is that from the moment he first revealed himself in Privet Drive, he made a determined and unremitting effort to play upon Harry's sympathies. He also made a point of laying on the flattery with a trowel (probably a good survival strategy with the Malfoys). For all that I doubt that Dobby fully understood most human motivations, he certainly knew more than he let on.

I think that, from somewhere, Dobby had grokked that most humans believe in the principle of reciprocation. (*hem! hem!* Slytherins and their interlocking networks of favors and obligations anyone?) Also that he had long ago looked around at his own working conditions and circumstances, compared it with that of some of the other Elves of other families he knows (one of whom I suspect had a tendency to be quite untactfully smug



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about how much her Master trusted her), and figured "well, buggin' this for a lark." And decided that even if it meant his own death, he wanted to be free of *these* Masters.

But he had not been able to annoy them to the point of freeing him, rather than killing him. And, of the two, he really would have preferred to be freed.

But, now, perhaps if he can really be of service to the "Great Harry Potter," maybe the great Harry Potter will somehow be able to help *him*.

At the very least, Dobby figured that Harry Potter, dead, would be unable to help anyone.

And about the only thing really necessary to follow this line of reasoning through to its conclusion is to assume that what in fact did happen through Dobby's interference was pretty much what Dobby *meant* to happen.



Stopping the kid's mail — which I suspect was *not* in his orders — *did* have Harry thinking that his friends had forgotten him, making him a little more receptive when Dobby decided to show himself. Maneuvering a warning letter from the MoM about underage magic was a clear alert that the matter was *important*. Blocking the barrier in King's Cross Station raised such a stink that even though the boy did eventually manage to make it to school despite the interference, it managed to fly under the radar and Dobby was not blamed for it.

But there is no clear reason why *Lucius* would have sent Dobby to Hogwarts in the middle of the term. No reason at all. He had already given the Diary to a Hogwarts-bound child,



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and from Draco's letters home, he would know that the Chamber had been opened at Halloween.

So what excuse did Dobby have to be there?

Well, this time I *do* think the matter may be down to Draco. One wonders if, in preparation for the Gryffindor-Slytherin match, Malfoy's *first* match against Potter; young Malfoy might not have written home asking his mother or father to send Dobby to him, or have simply taken it upon himself to call Dobby to him, since he had a task for him.

Namely a straightforward attempt to nobble the competition with a rogue bludger — giving Dobby a perfect opportunity to pass Harry another warning and an infodump in the hospital wing afterwards, with further hints of what was going on. After all; Dobby had no business at Hogwarts unless he was actually sent or summoned there by a member of the Malfoy family. And putting Harry in the hospital wing would give *every* appearance of faithfully executing Draco's orders.

And it is clear to the reader at least, that by that time whatever Dobby might have to say, it was going to be totally irrelevant to the major plot related to the Diary, which was already in development. The only thing served by that visitation was a reminder that; "Hey kid! There are no coincidences. There is a dangerous plot in progress, and *I'm on your side!*"

After all, Dobby had his own axe to grind.



Which brings us to a minor side trip related to the Dueling Club, which had nothing to do with Dobby.

In Book 1 it had eventually been established that there was

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some form of connection between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort. But given Harry's conduct during the crisis, as well as Voldemort's demonstrated continued implacable hostility toward the boy, Dumbledore was not further inclined to regard Harry with suspicion.

Until, that is, Harry turned up in the wrong place at the wrong time the night that Salazar's Chamber was opened the following year, and wild suspicions started flying all over again, this time over the "Heir of Slytherin."

Dumbledore knows kids, or at any rate he certainly *ought* to; and while he did not *really* think that Harry was responsible for the attack on Mrs. Norris, he could tell that the boy was holding some kind of information back. There was also still the uncomfortable recollection of that as yet unexamined connection with the entity that had possessed Quirrell — as well as the consideration that the second Fawkes-cored wand had chosen him. And for all his suspicions, Dumbledore was probably not *absolutely* sure of what had taken place when Voldemort had tried to kill the boy the first time.

Dumbledore is a Legilimens himself, but he doesn't seem to pry into people's heads any more than he can avoid, and he usually wants to establish all of his facts openly in front of witnesses before taking any kind of action. He must have been very concerned over just how far all of these connections went.

By that time Dumbledore had also had some 50 years to mull over what must have really taken place the year that the Chamber of Secrets was opened the first time and it is altogether too likely that he had already long figured out that somehow a Basilisk had been making free of the school that year. There were

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other *attacks* before Myrtle's death. And a non-fatal Basilisk attack results in petrification. So we are clearly dealing with a monster which is a stone-turner. There are very few monsters in folklore or mythology which are stone-turners. And a Parselmouth could negotiate with just about any of them.

By this time it has also now been solidly established in canon that it was not ever openly known at Hogwarts that Tom Riddle was a Parselmouth during the years that he was a student there. But Dumbledore was aware of it, because Riddle had boasted to him of it when he had given the boy his Hogwarts letter. In fact, even before the release of HBP, where my suspicions were confirmed, I strongly suspected that this information absolutely was not generally known, or, due to the association between Parseltongue and Salazar Slytherin alone Tom would have come under immediate suspicion the last time, and all the indications are that he never did..

But.

Dumbledore knows Voldemort's origins; he has long since worked it out that if "Lord" Voldemort is Tom Riddle — and he knows that Riddle is a Parselmouth — and he also knows that one of the classic stone-turning monsters (a very short list) is the *Basilisk*, which is a variety of *snake*, that the uproar during the Hogwarts academic year of 1942-'43; the year that the 2nd-year student named Myrtle Warren was killed and young Rubeus Hagrid was expelled had almost certainly been orchestrated by Riddle, who had been controlling and directing a Basilisk.

But... how?

And now some 50 years later, there has been *another*

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obvious Basilisk attack and Potter is acting suspiciously, and Dumbledore really does not want to have to believe that Riddle is now acting through Potter.

In addition; Dumbledore suddenly has Lucius Malfoy very much underfoot, and that is even more suspicious. Dumbledore flatly refuses to believe that Potter is dancing to *Malfoy's* tune.

But a Basilisk is a *snake*, and Riddle is a Parselmouth, and Potter has some sort of a connection to Riddle, and may be a *Horcrux*, to boot.

Is *Potter* a Parselmouth as well?

Could Potter simply have *overheard* the Basilisk as it moved through the walls? That might explain the boy's skittishness. It must have seemed worth establishing that much at least.

Very much as I believe that in PS/SS Dumbledore enlisted Snape and Filch's help in setting up the Mirror of Erised demonstration wherein he had them herd Harry into the room where the Mirror was set up so he could observe how the boy would respond when confronted with it, and later explained to Harry Potter the trick of how the Mirror worked. I think that in CoS he took Snape far enough into his confidence to pass on his suspicion that Potter may have acquired the gift of Parseltongue when Voldemort first tried to kill him and that it might be useful to establish whether this was the case.

Snape, being Snape, agreed that this might be useful indeed and, as Harry exceeded expectations in PS/SS by plunging into the Labyrinth to save the Stone, Snape exceeded expectations by making sure that Dumbledore's hypothesis was verified publicly, dramatically, and with the maximum negative impact upon Potter.

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Even though he prefers to establish his suspicions openly and before witnesses himself, Dumbledore was Not Pleased.

But Dumbledore, who liked to congratulate himself on the way the cosmic balance tends to reestablish itself, chalked it down to experience, and he got a certain degree of not-so-private amusement when he was able to sit back and watch what goes around, come around and bite Snape in the aftermath of Dumbledore's having been forced to engineer Sirius Black's escape from the school the following year. Snape could have readily avoided making an ass of himself in public by exercising a little open-mindedness and moderation. But open-mindedness and moderation are lessons that Snape is thoroughly determined not to learn one minute before he is forced to (much like Harry, when you come right down to it).

And, in the end, the evidence of Fawkes and Godric's sword was inarguable and assures us that by the end of CoS, we can safely say that Harry himself has never since, and never did ever come under personal suspicion from Albus Dumbledore, even if Dumbledore did have heavy reservations regarding Riddle's ability to connect through Potter.

Harry had amply proved himself, and Harry's own intentions, at least, had Dumbledore's complete confidence.



What seems likely however, is that *no one* in the series has ever been *in* Dumbledore's complete confidence. And most of Dumbledore's actions over the course of the series have served only to demonstrate his conviction that the truth is something to be approached with extreme caution. But, as the poster



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of yet another original theory pointed out, if Snape had been taken into that confidence since CoS concerning the connection between Harry and the enemy, which was certainly the case by the time of OotP, it would give us yet another possible reason for Snape's continuing detestation of Harry Potter.



Which brings us to the final show-down: just what could possibly be up with Dobby's clearly unrequested appearance in Dumbledore's office, in his Master's train at the end of the tale other than a gritty resolve to be "in at the kill" so he could engineer the final resolution of his year-long campaign? All of that pointing and head-thumping was clearly intended to make sure that Lucius Malfoy would be blamed for *exactly* what was most blameworthy in his part of the affair.

And I am convinced that Dobby pulled off a complete scam of his own under cover of the shambles of the Diary plot.

It has always been obvious that House Elves are the ones to do the laundry in the households that bind them. They also fold it and put it away, they pick up the clothes that people leave strewn about, wash, and tend them. It certainly isn't just their own hands that they are supposed to be ironing.

If House Elves are laundry elves. They can handle human clothing all day long without affecting their binding to their houses and families. And in order to free one you have to not just hand him an article of clothing, you have to *give* him an article of clothing, one which is clearly intended for *him*, as a *gift*, for his own. And make him take it.

And Lucius Malfoy did nothing of the kind.



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Malfoy threw a dirty sock (someone *else's* dirty sock!) away. Dobby caught it before it hit the ground and made a totally bogus pronouncement that; "Master has given Dobby a sock!"

It is perhaps indicative of Lucius Malfoy's inability to keep a cool head in a crisis that he didn't immediately snap; "I did nothing of the sort, and you know it. Now go home and iron your hands!" Instead he basically turned on Harry and snarled; "Look what you made me do!"

And Dobby *escaped*.

But I am no longer convinced that Dobby was ever properly *free*.

Four years later he is still trying to throw himself in the fire when he speaks poorly of the Malfoys. Nor does he ever settle down to dish the dirt about their past activities. And, for that matter, how was he able to pop directly into the cellar of the manor in DHs? Don't you think the Malfoys (in common with everybody else) would have had some kind of Apparition barrier for Elves that were not theirs? I think that when Albus hired Dobby, Albus was fully aware that what he was doing was harboring and giving protection to a runaway slave.

Which I suppose adds a certain additional degree of poignancy to Dobby's eventual epitaph.

But, no, we just cannot depend upon House Elves adopting their Masters' political biases. They have more choice than that. And they do not all suffer from Stockholm Syndrome. In fact half of the ones we've met so far emphatically do *not*.

And Kreachur was *not* the first Elf we watched betray a hated Master.

Resourcefulness, determination, a certain "disregard for rules." Check, check, and double-check. Traditional Slytherin

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qualities, all.

And while we are on the subject; for a House Elf to decide that he not only wanted to be free, but that, once free, he wanted to be *paid* for his work, strikes me as ambition on a level that even Salazar would admire.



Okay, just for fun let's kick around another possibility: this one is old enough to have long gray whiskers on it and has been completely hosed by later canon. I didn't take it very seriously in the first place, either. But it's fun.

What if, knowing only that the diary was a weapon, Lucius started writing in it HIMSELF? And got into a dialogue with young Riddle (in this variant the Diary Reverent would have *been* a young Riddle. Not the 54-year-old version masquerading as a 16-year-old, which I now solidly believe to be the case in canon). Malfoy is no naive 11-year-old. Plus, he is a man unlikely to pour out his soul over anything to anyone. So he was able to resist being taken over by Adolescent!Riddle. But he did fill Tom in on something about his glorious future. In return, maybe Tom filled him in on the Chamber and how he could open the Chamber and be released from the book.

They hatched the plot together, and Lucius only needed to get the diary into the hands of any child (other than Draco) bound for Hogwarts. This version about plays, and makes it very clear that the plot *did* concern Tom Riddle rather than Voldemort, just as Dobby claimed, but this makes it unclear just how Dobby could have "heard" anything about the plot, unless Lucius discussed it with his wife. Or spoke to the Diary as well

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as writing in it.

In any case, after hearing about the Quirrell debacle through his usual channels, I suspect that Lucius's long-term intention was to supplant Voldemort, in his absence. Supposing that, after the aforementioned "correspondence" with young Tom, he realized that he had a multi-purpose tool here that could go either of two ways, with little risk to himself.

He agreed to do what he could to release the Reverent from the book. Once the Diary Reverent was released, Lucius intended to contact Diary!Tom (he certainly kept a close enough eye on the school during the kids' second year to learn whether the Reverent had been released or not) and continue to feed him the glorious story of what he had done over the past 50 years. Then regroup the Death Eaters in Voldemort's name, under the Revenant's titular leadership.

But, in actuality, Lucius may have thought that he would be able to keep a 16-year-old Riddle under his own influence and be the real guiding spirit behind the revived Death Eater movement, ultimately dispensing with their young "Master." If this was the case, he would have been wiser to have refreshed his memory on what happens to people who underestimate Tom Riddle.

Or he may have thought that the minute things started looking dicey, he would send Diary!Riddle off to Albania and let whichever variant would, win, and reap his reward for attempting to restore his Master.



But I still contend that since the real Voldemort had tried to

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capture the Philosopher's Stone the previous year and failed, and the Stone was now destroyed, Lucius may have thought that there was no way that the original Voldemort could ever return, and that the way was now clear for him to set himself up as the new Dark Lord of British wizardry. And to reduce resistance he would need to depose Albus Dumbledore from his position of power, seeing all of Albus's offices filled with people he could direct. Everything in Lucius's behavior between CoS and the end of GoF would support this reading a good deal more readily than any sort of "loyal follower" one.

Which would make the rather mild rebuke Voldemort gave him in the graveyard all the more mystifying. Until you stop and think, and realize that with his organization in shambles after his 13-year absence, Voldemort needed Lucius and his resources a good deal more than Lucius needed him. And Voldemort really wasn't altogether stupid. There is a good deal of evidence in favor of the reading that Voldemort's true intent, from the point of his return, was to use Lucius and Lucius's resources, use them up, and dispense with him before his ambitions grew to be too much of a problem.

In the meantime, following this scenario, the plots that Dobby claims to have overheard would have been Lucius and whoever else he was planning to stage his coup with. Because in this case Lucius would certainly have been aiming to make use of Voldemort's old network and would likely have had partners in the endeavor.

But in any case, I do rather think the Basilisk's re-entry into the proceedings took Lucius by surprise, for even if he had been in correspondence with young Riddle the year before, Riddle

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would have been very cagey about just what Salazar's monster actually was and what it could do. But, once it was in play, Lucius grabbed the ball and ran with it, using its attacks as a crowbar to pry Dumbledore out of the school and to frame Hagrid for the dangerous goings-on all over again.

And, regardless; my primary contention still applies. In retrospect, Stone and Chamber do not read like two separate, unrelated adventures, they read like Plan A and Plan B of the Dark Lord's first campaign to restore himself.

(The Dark that Failed?)



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On Rowling's original website, we finally were given some confirmation that Office of the Minister of Magic is an appointive one, and is almost certainly chosen through election by the members of the Wizengamot from among themselves. The Wizard of the Month on Rowling's first official site for April, 2006 was one Grogan Stump, a highly popular Minister for Magic, who held the office early in the 19th century, and was "appointed" in 1811. There are probably no general elections for any Ministry offices by the wizarding public.

Even though that official site was never *truly* canon, we never saw anything in the books to call it to question, so we can probably take it as read.



We are told the Wizengamot is a body of 50 witches and wizards representing a population that Rowling claims is about 3,000. The wizarding public is represented by the Wizengamot, through as yet undetermined procedures. Much of fanon has postulated that it is composed of hereditary seats held by the Heads of prominent families, the Heads of key Ministry Departments, and recipients of the Order of Merlin. Which all seems as good a guess as any.

When one reflects that a nation with a population the size of that of the United States of America is represented by 100 Senators, or that the 3.9+ million residents of the City of Los Angeles are governed by a Mayor, and Council of 15, the British wizarding world's degree of individual representation in their over-government doesn't look half bad.

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If Rowling is to be believed, there are probably no more wizards in the entire world than there are people in the modern city of Chester. And those in the British isles would be able to muster a town no larger than modern Padstow in Cornwall, if that. A full House of Commons would hardly be reasonable for such a small population. Not to mention that the Wizengamot they already have is hardly a House of Lords.

Consequently, the Minister of Magic is (probably) elected by the Wizengamot, is answerable to it, draws his support from the factions represented in it, and subjects all proposed laws to its approval.

So anyone who wants a shot at the office of Minister has to have the backing of a majority of the members of the Wizengamot.

And, up to the opening of OotP, Albus Dumbledore was the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

This may have been a largely ceremonial office, or he may have been running the whole show. Or anything whatsoever in between. In canon, we have no way of knowing.

But, as soon as the breach with the Ministry was settled at the end of OotP, he immediately put on his “authority” hat again. Just like (we are invited to believe) he had worn it all through VoldWar I. And found that it didn’t fit so well as it had before.

After making a total berk of himself over the previous year, Fudge’s chances of a continued term in office were already toast. But his replacement, Rufus Scrimgeour, was far less willing to play ball at Albus Dumbledore’s prompting than Fudge had once been, back in the day. The breach between the Headmaster and the Ministry may have been bridged, but it was certainly not healed.



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One seriously has to wonder whether replacing Fudge, with whom Albus was more or less willing to work, with Scrimgeour — with whom he evidently couldn’t, might not have been someone else’s clever idea. That replacement was almost certainly stage-managed from outside the Wizengamot itself. Particularly when you consider the outrageous ultimatum that Voldemort publicly handed Fudge. Between that and the internal calls for Fudge’s replacement after the PROPHET outed the Ministry’s policy of denial, there wasn’t any way that Fudge could be retained, but the available choice of replacement, and the *manner* of forcing the Wizengamot’s hand was... suggestive.

Not that Scrimgeour was being proposed or supported by Lord Voldemort or his followers. For, despite his lack of effectiveness, Scrimgeour does appear to have been honestly committed to resisting Lord Voldemort and all his works. I simply think that Scrimgeour was handed a pair of shoes that he was unable to fill, and he was too proud to accept direction. Not, given the track record, that accepting direction from Albus Dumbledore was likely to have been any better. But Scrimgeour made a sufficiently visible place-holder at a point that one was deemed needed.

In the meantime, Albus had also lost some of his oldest support on the Wizengamot when Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden resigned in protest over his ouster the year earlier. We do not know who replaced them, either. Or who suggested those replacements.

Which may be a hint of something rather new. Back when Fudge took office, there was still a faction who would have liked to see Dumbledore take the position of Minister, himself.



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One wasn't hearing much from this particular clique by the opening of HBP.

But even if that lot were still around, they could go on wanting. Dumbledore wasn't so deluded that thought he could run the Wizengamot, AND the International Confederacy of Wizards (oh, yeah, he heads that too), AND the Ministry, AND personally oversee the training of Harry Potter all at the same time. Pick any three.

We may not ever know just when Albus Dumbledore became Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, but I think we can safely assume he had a Wizengamot seat well before he became Headmaster (some time between '57 and about '63). He'd already turned the post of Minister for Magic down three times by then, and I doubt that the Wizengamot has ever tried to appoint anyone but one of their own.

Albus never did dare to take that job. Or think that he *ought* to take it, anyway.

But that's okay, there were plenty of other people who would be happy to take it.

Case in point: Bartemius Crouch Sr.



We have no idea what Dumbledore thought of Crouch's candidacy for the position.

Nor do we know whether there had formally been a change in Minister pending at any time between 1981 and 1983, or indeed, between 1981 and 1990 for Crouch to be pinning his hopes upon. Millicent Bagnole had only taken office in 1980, so it isn't like she was a lame-duck Minister coming to the close of her term



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of office. Admittedly, we do not know for certain whether the MfM serves for a set term of years, or whether once appointed you can just hold the position until you seriously blot your copy-book with the Wizengamot, or simply get tired of all the agro. If the questions in the third round of the WOMBAT tests posted on Rowling's official website are to be taken as a suggestion, a term of around 10 years appears to be typical, but we have no way of telling how far we can trust much of anything that only showed up in the WOMBATs, which were never really canon.

Barty may have been vying for the post off his own bat in the manner of attempting a palace coup. And at a guess; Barty Crouch, from what his enemies have to say about him, anyway, would probably not have been Albus Dumbledore's first choice for Minister. But Albus had worked with the man, and if he had had any expectation of being able to apply his own influence upon policy, would probably have done so again.

The LiveJournalist known as Pharnabazus, in his splendid examination and analysis of the operation of the interdependent patronage networks upon which wizarding society depends offers us a rather different reading of the elder Mr Crouch's character from the readers' usual first impression. One which gave my own attention to such details a bit of a jump-start and led me to a conclusion that threw many of my earlier assumptions into question.

Throughout GoF we never, not even once, heard the slightest account, not a single word, about Bartemius Crouch Sr that was given us by someone who honestly admired the man. And there certainly was such a person in evidence, someone who was not in the least reticent about Mr Crouch's sterling qualities.



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But we completely dismissed Percy Weasley's sincere regard for Crouch and instead took all of our reading of his character from "Mad-Eye Moody" and Sirius Black.

Now, just how clever was that? I swear, that's downright *embarrassing*.

The false Mad-Eye Moody assures us that Crouch was more ruthless than he ever was. Sirius Black tells us that Crouch was obsessed with catching just "one more Dark wizard."

And yet Crouch clearly accepted Lucius Malfoy's (and Avery's) Imperius defense, and we sat there and watched him cut a deal with Karkaroff when the real Moody would have thrown away the key. This picture of "ruthless warrior for the Light" is further compromised by Barty Crouch Jr's "confession," and frankly, there are so many points of issue in that confession that don't match up to what we actually saw going on in the book that I don't believe a word of it. Can we at least agree that Barty Crouch Jr had a strong interest in seeing to it that his father was depicted in the worst possible light?

And as for Sirius Black; we already have ample demonstration of Sirius Black's unreliability where it comes to reading the character of others. We were consistently led to underestimate Pettigrew, which is usually a dangerous mistake, and I think that we may have been led to misread Crouch as well.

Not that the issue was likely to recur in the final outplay of the story. By the end of GoF the story had moved well beyond Barty Crouch Sr's place in it.

But, what is more, Sirius *admits* that he only put together his picture of the Decline and Fall of Barty Crouch Sr after he escaped from Azkaban, and I really doubt that Barty Crouch

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was still a household word by then.

Consequently what Sirius was patching together would have predominantly been the rumors and innuendos which had been circulating in Azkaban since his son's assumed death, or those which had been dredged up more recently (under whose direction I wonder?) that got hashed over in the PROPHECY in the course of reporting the revival of the TriWizard Tournament under his leadership, or, later, of Crouch Sr's absence from work and his suspected illness. Sirius's personal satisfaction at the tale he has pieced together shines through his "wise counselor" narrative like a beacon. Can we also agree that Sirius Black has no reason to admire the man who consigned him to life with the Dementors without a trial?



However, when you look past what is said about the man's character by his enemies, and concentrate on his known actions, you get a picture of a pragmatic politician, just as corrupt, but probably not any more so than any other we've been shown in the Potterverse to date. Moreover, a politician with a willingness to make any kind of deal that might forestall another Dark rising.

The wizarding world is a very small community. Crouch would have been able to gauge who it would be safe to cut a deal with, because he would know exactly who had the most to lose. In fact, by all indications, until the year that Professor Quirrell came back from his travels on the continent twitching and stammering, the greater wizarding world appears to have taken no appreciable harm from the fact that Igor Karkaroff and Lucius Malfoy were walking free in it.

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Pharnabazus suggests that in return for a tacit promise of his future good behavior, as well as a promise to keep his associates under restraint, Barty Crouch Sr accepted Lucius Malfoy's Imperius defense and basically agreed to leave him alone so long as he behaved himself, and stayed out of politics. He quite possibly also initially had either agreed to drop the prosecution of Malfoy's sister-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law or arranged for their release.

This reading, supported by Pharnabazus's full line of reasoning plays very well.

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/pharnabazus/715.html>

However, Pharnabazus's interpretation was posted quite a few years ago, and we were given a bit more information to play with since then.

At that point in the series we did not know whether Lucius's father Abraxus Malfoy was still alive at the time of Voldemort's first defeat. It also fails to take the personalities of fanatics into account. Most notably the personalities of Bellatrix Lestrange and her associates.

Since, we didn't know that Lucius's father might still have been around at the end of VoldWar I, we did not consider that the Malfoy that Crouch Sr cut his deal with was a good deal more likely to have been Abraxus, rather than Lucius.

Abraxus Malfoy appears to have survived long enough for his grandson to be claiming to remember him. So that puts his death somewhere in the '80s, at the earliest. I am rather more inclined to believe that he did not die until 1991-'92. His grandson Draco's first year at Hogwarts.

Being finally off his father's leash might also explain why

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we were suddenly tripping over Lucius every time we turned around, from the summer of '92 until he was forcibly taken off the game board at the end of Year 5, four years later.

It makes a LOT more sense for it to have been Abe and Barty who were the deal makers. For one thing, we have no clear reason to believe that Abraxus was actually a DE himself, however much he may have approved of the public perception of what Voldemort claimed to stand for (like the elder Blacks, he took the word of the kids who were already inside the organization).

The elder Malfoy and Crouch could have been at Hogwarts together. Before Riddle, I suspect; or, just as possibly, right afterwards, in the interregnum before there was a DE organization to consider. There was no Malfoy in the Slug Club with Riddle that we know of, nor a Crouch. Although as one of Sluggy's acquaintances, Abraxus is likely to have been somewhat older than Riddle.

We do not know for certain how old Crouch Sr was either, although if he is represented by the "Is" notation appended to Charis Black and Caspar Crouch's marriage line as shown on the Black family tapestry sketch, then his mother was born in 1919, suggesting a birth year for him around the early 1940s, making him much younger than a Malfoy who might be an associate of Horace Slughorn's, but quite old enough to have passed through Hogwarts and into the Ministry before the DEs had shown up above the horizon.

But, given the entangled family connections among purebloods there is every reason to suspect that the Crouches and the Malfoys might also have been connected to some degree in

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some manner apart from their years of Hogwarts attendance. Possibly very closely connected. And Abraxus Malfoy may have also been younger than Riddle, although Slughorn implies that he was at least somewhat elderly at the time of his death.

In any case, there was at least a long-enough standing association between the Malfoy and Crouch families, for their House Elves to have known one another — which was already established in canon before Crouch banished Winky from his home. It is even possible that the late Madam Crouch was originally a Malfoy (she was blonde in any case, although that in itself doesn't prove anything). Or, for that matter, that Lucius's mother may have been a Crouch. Obliging your brother-in-law (or father-in-law) by accepting an Imperius defense for a family member is the kind of thing that would be expected of a Ministry official in the ww.

And Abraxus may have had leverage to bear on Crouch. He could have known about young Barty Jr's involvement in the movement. He would have used it, too, if Lucius knew, and told him.

He wouldn't have been the only one to know of it, either. That was all but certainly the information that enabled the Lestranges to "talk their way out of Azkaban" as well.

But the Malfoys may not have known that — although the Lestranges, certainly did. Barty Sr simply may have trusted Abraxus's promise to keep his own son under control and out of further trouble.

Ergo: the chronology goes; Abe and Barty cut a deal, Lucius is put on a short leash by his father and behaves himself. From Abraxus's PoV, Lucius's in-laws, the Black/Lestrangle connection,

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may have been perceived to be a potential threat to the family's continuing peace of mind, but they were not his problem.

Or were they?



Which brings us once again, to the Longbottom affair.

Over the three-year summer between Year 4 and Year 5 it became a widely held theory in some (generally younger) circles of fandom that Neville Longbottom was suffering from the effects of a botched or overly-strong memory charm placed on him at the time of his parents' torture at the hands of Death Eaters. According to this theory he also was believed to "know something" about Voldemort.

I did not agree with this reading of the matter then, and said so, and we certainly don't hear much about it now. I didn't think that this theory was necessary to the story as it stood, and with the passage of time it became progressively less likely that anything Neville might have overheard as a toddler would be of any use regarding Voldemort's present threat.

But at that time it was never clear whether the Longbottom affair was actually a key event to something that we needed to discover, or if it was merely another piece of set-dressing to heighten the "drama." Indications now are that it was probably the latter.

In an early reading of the matter, I postulated that the whole Longbottom affair may well have been a deliberate kamikaze operation undertaken for the express purpose of discrediting Barty Crouch Sr who was getting dangerously close to becoming the next Minister for Magic.

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At that point, such a deliberate sacrifice on the part of the Pensieve Four still looked like a possibility. With the prospect of a ww under Crouch's leadership, and given his public reputation, the remaining Death Eaters might have seen no hope of their managing to go underground and put their Voldemort years behind them.

Even if his most zealous followers' hopes were in vain, and Voldemort had indeed been permanently destroyed, Crouch had to be stopped, or they, collectively or individually, had no future to speak of.

The Pensieve Four may even have known perfectly well that the Longbottoms' had no critical information as to the whereabouts of Lord Voldemort.

Well, that was a very early reading of the situation. By the end of OotP that reading was no longer at all satisfactory.

It became *particularly* unsatisfactory after Rowling stated on her official website that the Lestranges had been "sent" after the Longbottoms.

And then never gave us any indication of why, or by whom. And still hasn't.



We had several possibilities there:

One of these is to run with Bellatrix's statement, made at her sentencing — in which it is made abundantly clear that *she* doesn't believe Voldemort is dead — and to wonder whether Albus's statement that his followers do not know about his Horcruxes may have been somewhat more wide of the mark than typical, and that she may be quite aware of *exactly* why he isn't

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dead. (This becomes even more likely given that she was put in charge of protecting the Cup.)

Another is to run with Rowling's statement on the official site that the Lestranges were "sent" after the Longbottoms.

My main premise here is that somewhere along the line, someone — we do not know who — may have regarded Bella & Co as just too much of a potential loose cannon. As one of the younger crop of Death Eaters, and a personal favorite of the Dark Lord (who she claims trained her in the Dark Arts himself) Bellatrix may not have seen as much action during VoldWar I as she thinks she ought to have, and is still itching to prove herself. She would also have felt cheated of her inevitable glory in the Dark Lord's service. In short, she was a *totally* loose cannon that any Death Eater who wanted to keep his head down and make his peace with the Ministry could not afford. She had to be neutralized, and quickly, before she rocked the boat, went looking for the Dark Lord and managed to bring him back.

From this starting point we have three almost equally plausible scenarios which might explain the Longbottom affair.

- 1 The first is that it all played out exactly as it appears. Bellatrix and her companions, young (late 20s), rash, and self-deluded, independently managed to convince themselves that the Longbottoms, a pair of popular Aurors, who Voldemort may have expressed some interest in over the last years of his rise, might have information leading to Voldemort's current whereabouts, and staged the attack unprompted by anyone outside their own little circle. Thereby causing a complete public embarrassment for all their families, and

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jeopardizing the whole Malfoy/Crouch agreement.

This reading works perfectly well inside of actual canon, but like I say, Rowling stated on her official site that the Lestranges were “sent” to attack the Longbottoms.

At that point most of us were still inclined to take Rowling at her word

- 2 A second possibility is that somebody, i.e., somebody else as yet unidentified, but someone not enthusiastic about the prospect of a resumption of the war, quickly realized that these particular loose cannons were all too likely to actively go off looking for Voldemort, and that there was a chance that they might find him. Consequently, they needed to be neutralized before they made any progress in that direction. Consequently, the Lestranges were judiciously fed disinformation leading them to the Longbottoms.
- 3 Or, one of the Malfoys orchestrated the affair himself, to serve his own purposes. We get every indication that Lucius and Bellatrix had always been rivals. They hate each other’s guts, and you get no impression that this is a recent development. In this scenario Lucius doesn’t even need to have known of young Barty’s involvement in the DE organization. The same can be just as readily said for Abraxus.



When you stop to consider the matter, looking at the issue from another direction: Lucius has a wife and family. From this

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point of view, the Lestranges are doubly “inconvenient.”

I really would not bet much on the chances that Lucius was unaware of the fact that, now fully expecting Sirius Black to die in Azkaban without issue, with Bellatrix and any hypothetical children of hers solidly out of the running, his own wife and infant son would ultimately become the collateral heirs to whatever remained of the Black fortunes.

The Blacks are an ancient family, but their name is clearly soon to be extinct, and their line also is dwindling to a close. The last living male heir is bunged up in Azkaban, and he won’t be coming home again. Among the female heirs, Bellatrix and Narcissa have the strongest claim upon the family’s remaining holdings.

Lucius is not a complete fool, but he judges other people’s motives by his own. It is also altogether possible that he was fairly certain that although Crouch might make deals, he would just as soon throw Lucius, and his entire “network” into Azkaban and loose the key. Lucius may have feared that if Bellatrix got seriously out of line Crouch might well use that as an excuse to break any agreement that had been struck with his father. For that matter, Lucius may have believed that if Crouch climbed to the top of the Ministry ladder, he might feel that he could afford to dispense with earlier agreements. And Crouch was only one step from the top, and he was ambitious.

Of course one also has to stop and consider the Black fortune itself — including all of the nasty knickknacks — that was not altogether inconsiderable. In this particular equation. Lucius may have largely disregarded any complication presented by the Crouch agreement. If Lucius was behind the incident, his objective could have been solely to eliminate Bellatrix from the

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line of inheritance.

Mind you, the last thing that Lucius wanted would be to see Crouch completely discredited. Should Crouch be so thoroughly discredited that he would be forced to resign in disgrace, his successor would not be aware of any agreements at all, and Lucius was depending on that agreement to ensure his return to a quiet life without further interference from the Ministry. The best of all possible worlds would be to shed his more dangerous encumbrances while engineering a situation which would leave Crouch exactly where he was for as long as possible. With no backtrail leading to himself.

In which case, he may have miscalculated.



Crouch was badly stung in the operation. Barty Jr managed to get himself roped into Bella's schemes, which, if he had earlier managed to convince his father of his innocence, would explain his father's bug-eyed fury at his getting publicly caught out. And would, incidentally have painted the Lestranges as oathbreakers. But Abraxus conspicuously kept to his end of their bargain, and Lucius kept his head down.

And so the matter rested, for some time. We do not know how long.



We do not know for how long, because we have no direct information whatsoever as to just when Barty Sr was shifted from the Head of the DMLE to the Head of the Department of International Magical cooperation.

It could have been that Crouch was swept up in a general

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personnel rotation attendant upon Fudge's installation as Minister, possibly as late as 1990. Or his removal could have been at some other point before we met him. A recent possibility that has arisen is that he may have been shifted due to an altercation between Crouch and Fudge during the course of Harry's first year at Hogwarts.

In any event, *someone* authorized a series of raids upon the homes of suspected Dark wizards over the course of that year. Whether this was on the authority of Amelia Bones, who would have been unaware of any gentlemen's bargains which Crouch might have made, off the record, Fudge upon a hint of possible future increased Dark Arts activity which had been confided to him by Albus Dumbledore, or by Crouch himself is uncertain.

Amelia Bones took Crouch's place as the head of the DMLE before the opening of GoF. There is a good deal of reason to suppose that Amelia Bones's appointment to the head of the DMLE was of comparatively recent date. As Pharnabazus points out, we only began hearing of Ministry raids on suspected Dark Wizards' homes, at the beginning of CoS. He concludes that these raids were made on her authority. He may well be right. But there are other possibilities.

However, if these raids were authorized by the Minister himself, it is likely that Crouch, who had been in his position since before the end of the war might have raised objections to being left out of the loop. Any altercation between the two would have given the Wizengamot — which Crouch tended to make actively uncomfortable with his unrelenting wartime mindset — the excuse they needed to remove him from his office and send him to an internal Coventry where he would be giving grief to

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wizards in foreign parts instead. To a man of Fudge's caliber, Crouch, even somewhat discredited, was far too close and far too ambitious for comfort. If Crouch had not been reassigned in a general rotation about the time of Fudge's appointment, he would have probably been shunted to the sidelines fairly soon after Fudge took office.

If Abraxus Malfoy died in an outbreak of dragon pox in early 1992, from that point, all deals were off.

In any case; Lucius (or whoever was behind the business) would have been confident that it would take very little effort on his part to goad Bellatrix into an act of supreme folly and get her out of his way.

One would think that any Auror of the day would probably have had as much information as Frank Longbottom did. So any Auror would have served the purpose insofar as extraction of information goes. (Oh, well, yes, the Lestranges DID probably get at least some information from the Longbottoms — on other subjects of interest — and may have passed it on before they were captured.)

Which raises the question of why target the Longbottoms?

The simplest reading is that the Longbottoms were specifically targeted because of their popularity, or more likely because Voldemort had shown an interest in the family during the last phase of his rise. We did have it from Rowling, posted on her original site that the Lestranges were not aware of the Prophecy.

Actually, Voldemort would have taken great care that most of his followers were *not* aware of that Prophecy. But as Aurors and members of Dumbledore's Order (which was NOT a secret society in VoldWar I) the Longbottoms might have been

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desirable targets in any case. Unless we can assume a purely personal grudge upon the part of the Lestranges against the Longbottoms — which is always a possibility in such a tight-knit society as the wizarding world.

In any case, Neville may very well have had a few more mysteries about him, but obsolete information on the former whereabouts of VaporMort is not one of them.



Well, on this particular subject of why the Longbottoms, my fellow-traveler, the theorist known as Swythyv raised a question (in an e-mail) that seems worth exploring. Much of this reasoning is also explored in the essay of 'The Longbottom Affair', in the 'Missed Opportunities' sub-collection.

The chief question here is; how did Albus know that VaporMort was lurking in Albania?

For the purpose of building a comprehensive backstory, "Because JKR says so" just doesn't quite cut it, does it?

Admittedly, by the time the series ended, given the numbers of witches and wizards who seemed to be determined to go there, it was beginning to sound like going to Albania is very much along the same lines as holidaying on the Riviera. But that certainly doesn't explain why Tom decided to hole up there for the entire period that he was without a body. For that matter, his whole *modus operandi* in flitting off to Albania to haunt a forest comes across as decidedly counter-productive, given that he seems to have floated off there and then been determined to just wait it out until someone came and offered him a ride back. (Which all puts me rather in mind of; "...and their pants

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fell down, and they all ran off to Bare-Bottomland!”)

Surely it would have been easier for him to take possession of the body of someone who had been administered the Dementor’s Kiss, and sneak off under another identity without making such a nonsensical fuss about it.

And how is Albus supposed to have figured out where he went? Rowling has a really bad record of keeping track of who knew what, when, but this is a particularly long stretch. And yet Albus seems to have had no hesitation in stating at the end of CoS that Tom was again off haunting a forest in Albania.

For the record, I am pretty sure that Albus had been keeping that forest monitored by some procedure well in advance of PS/SS, or how else would he have known he was suddenly going to need to set up something like the Philosopher’s Stone scam by the time QuirrellMort set foot in Britain?

Albus didn’t know anything about the hunt for the Ravenclaw diadem, after all. Helena Ravenclaw never made a confidante out of him. And even though Tom may have spent anything up to a decade in Albania searching for the diadem, it doesn’t explain why he should have been drawn back there when his own curse backfired on him.

And where might such a clue to his whereabouts have come from?

Well, Swythv raised the possibility that the Albanian connection may have come up during one of Crouch’s questioning sessions with one of the apprehended DEs. I immediately skipped ahead and started taking a closer look at Igor Karkaroff.

Karkaroff is one of the DEs who is about of an age with Tom Riddle himself, and along with possibly Doholof and

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maybe a couple of others, he also seems to have originally been from eastern Europe. That is the general catchment area for Durmstrang, after all. There is every likelihood that he first took up with Tom during the period that Tom was off playing Indiana Riddle in the forests of Albania, searching for the fabled lost treasure of Ravenclaw. Especially if my suspicion that Albania has a lively wizarding tourist trade is on target. If it is a popular destination for wizards from Britain, it is likely to be even more so among the wizards of eastern Europe.

Information that Tom had spent several years in one particular foreign country could be enough to at least suggest that he might have gone back there. For that matter, given the amount of time he spent there, it might suggest that he had acquired some property there. Which I certainly think is likely.

Albus does have a quick imagination, and a fair degree of intuition as well. We may not know the method he used, but I think he did manage to get some form of monitoring set up in the vicinity of the area that Tom had formerly been so familiar with. And whatever the method was, it registered something.

Wizards don’t seem to have an extradition policy. Karkaroff was arrested and sentenced in Britain. Nor does he seem to have made much of a fuss over that to his own government so long as Tom was still alive and kicking.

But the minute his Dark mark disappeared, Igor was clamoring to make a plea bargain. The hearing that we witnessed was a fairly large one, even if it wasn’t exactly a matter of public record. It was probably made before the whole Wizengamot and much of the DMLE. Although not the press.

But, even though Crouch agreed to let Karkaroff out of Azka-

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ban, you might well imagine that he would have hauled him over the coals more than once, grilling him about the entire period of his association with Riddle before he turned him loose to leave Britain. And he probably would not have been doing it alone.

Under normal circumstances, you would expect a high-ranking Auror like Moody to have taken a part in the proceedings. But Moody had been the one to have arrested Karkaroff, and Crouch was probably not quite tactless enough to have involved him in the procedures attendant to his release. Frank Longbottom seems to have been a well-known and high-profile up-and-coming Auror. Crouch might have considered him a very reasonable second choice.

And even though I doubt that Crouch was any more fond of Albus than Albus was of him, he at least would have been confident that Albus was just as opposed to Lord Voldemort as he was. And, for that matter, we do not know for certain whether the Ministry-employed Order members were particularly forthcoming about their involvement with Albus's little band of vigilantes during VoldWar I, either. Crouch may not have realized that the Longbottoms might be leaking information to Albus. And, indeed, they may not have been. But, again, they might. Albus has to have learned it *somewhere*.

In any case, it would have been easy enough for young Barty Jr. to find out who had taken part in questioning Karkaroff before he was released.

And, unlike Karkaroff, Longbottom was still in Britain.



I do contend that even if Rowling hadn't given us the state-

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ment that the Longbottoms were targeted by a 3rd party, *somebody's* real purpose for that whole exercise was almost certainly to get shut of a potential embarrassment to his own best advantage. But to someone who knew of Barty Jr's loyalties, discrediting Crouch is still a real possibility.

By goading the Lestranges to publicly commit the sort of atrocity which would get the whole wizarding world — now slipping into complacency after Voldemort's defeat — up in arms, he would be setting a stage in which Barty Jr, who, if nothing else, was a superb actor, could be trusted to enact the unjustly accused (possibly) innocent victim to as wide an audience as possible, in an attempt to save his own skin. The Pensieve Four would thereby place Crouch's father into a no-win situation, and whichever action Crouch Sr decided to take the matter, he was going to end up looking bad.

But yet, on yet a third hand, just any Auror of the day was not necessarily yet another distant Black family connection, either. As Frank Longbottom seems to be. In fact, he also appears to be in the succession for the Black family holdings, although his claim was not as strong as Bellatrix's and Narcissa's. (And, for that matter, on the strength of the dodgy family tapestry sketch, the same can be said of Harry Potter, *and* the Crouches.)

Whatever the backstory of the Longbottom affair might have been, (or whichever possibility you prefer) the Lestranges could hardly have gone into it with their eyes completely shut. They had to have been aware of the probable cost to themselves. They had Crouch Sr's track record to work from and they had narrowly "talked their way out of Azkaban" once already. This

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stunt was bound to cancel out any bargaining chip that they had used to do it. If they were caught, they were not going to be let off a second time.

It is uncertain whether Crouch Jr realized exactly what he was agreeing to let himself in for. But he was young enough for the grand gesture of martyrdom to have its own appeal. Particularly if he could bring down his hated father by embracing it.

Or, they all really were arrogant enough to believe that they simply wouldn't get caught.

We also know nothing of the circumstances of their capture. They could have been apprehended just as they were on the point of departing for Albania, themselves.

We have already been told that Sirius Black was not the only suspect to be imprisoned without trial. However, the amount of publicity attached to the Longbottom affair, and the fact that the attack was carried out after the war was officially over guaranteed that Crouch Sr wasn't going to be able to get away with that particular maneuver this time. They were all assured of at least some form of a trial.

The possibility that the Lestranges and Crouch Jr deliberately put themselves into Azkaban seems to be supported by Bellatrix Lestrange's grandiose statement at their sentencing. However, now that we've met the lady a few times more, it appears just as likely that she was merely making a grand empty gesture in the face of the inevitable.

And even if Barty Jr did understand when he agreed to it that he was engaged on what would turn out to be a suicide mission, the full horror of what this entailed was not clear to him until he was actually in the custody of the Dementors. Sev-



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eral months' influence of the Dementors, followed by a decade under Imperius as his father's prisoner were quite enough to turn his mind altogether. It is no wonder that he sincerely loathed any of his former fellows who hadn't the nerve to go to Azkaban for their Dark Lord's sake; with a particularly rich store of resentment reserved for Lucius Malfoy, that he was willing to take out on the man's son.

I'll admit that I do find that particular detail suggestive.

The news that Crouch Jr was still alive and in his father's custody was a piece of genuine buried treasure in Bertha Jorkins's damaged memory. Not that her more up-to-date, surface information regarding the revival of the TriWizard Tournament and the hiring of Alastor Moody as the new DADA teacher at Hogwarts was at all to be despised either. Pettigrew had been able to fill his Master in on nearly everything else of importance that had been going down in the British wizarding world from the night at Godric's Hollow, right up to the evening that he made his escape from Hogwarts. (Although he doesn't seem to have mentioned the Diary.) Peter had been keeping a whicker in the spy game from his refuge with the Weasleys over the entire period, and he heard pretty much everything that was floating around in public domain, as well as whatever spin that the Ministry had put on it, but he did not know of these more recent events. Between the two of them, Jorkins's and Pettigrew's information was invaluable in bringing Tom up to speed.

Therefore, Voldemort was well aware that the Lestranges and young Crouch had gone to Azkaban and that they had tried to get whatever information the Aurors of the time may have had as to his whereabouts. The news of Barty's escape



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and imprisonment by his father spoke loudly in favor of his continued loyalty, since that loyalty had remained uncompromised by his having made any kind of peace with either his father or with the Ministry.

Consequently, the Pensieve Four's suicide mission had succeeded in its covert objective, if there was any such covert objective. Crouch was soon being viewed with grave misgivings by the cooler heads at the Ministry, and in the Wizengamot, and his chances of becoming the next Minister for Magic gradually faded from the realm of the possible. At some point, probably around the time Cornelius Fudge took office, or soon after, he was shunted sideways into the Department of International Magical Cooperation, where his unwavering fixation over the hunt for Dark wizards could be a source of less potential embarrassment, or potential damage to the Ministry's reputation.



In point of fact, I now suspect that Crouch's "fixation" was no greater than it ever had been, but was merely the spin that the PROPHET put on it (assisted by the formidable Rita, no doubt). The perceptions of the Wizengamot, and of the wizarding world in general had become so accustomed to a world without He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, that Barty Crouch's "constant vigilance" must have made them all highly uncomfortable. One recalls that Alastor Moody also "retired" right about the same time we first were introduced to Barty Crouch Sr, as the Head of International Magical Cooperation.

One now wonders whether Moody's retirement was altogether voluntary, either. It should be noted that no new can-

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didates had been accepted into the Auror training program after 1991, when Nymphadora Tonks began her training under Moody. And that he retired immediately after she and her cohort passed their final qualifications suggests that the Wizengamot saw little need to recruit new Aurors. By 1994 Fudge would have consolidated his position as Minister.

As to the timing of Crouch's transfer; At this point it is still somewhat uncertain. Bertha Jorkins, according to Percy Weasley had been in "our Department" at the time her memory had been damaged, which would indicate that Crouch had already been removed from his position as the Head of the DMLE. But we do not know how long poor Bertha had been getting underfoot in Bagman's office before her eventual disappearance.

Her transfer into Bagman's office has all the earmarks of a bit of spite on Crouch's part. He despised Bagman and had probably never been convinced by his bluff, "unwitting tool" story. For the record, neither am I, although unlike Crouch, I do admit it's certainly possible.



Meanwhile, we were left with the default impression (possibly completely erroneous) that the removal of Crouch Sr from the running back in 1982-'83 had thrown the position of Minister for Magic wide open for the taking. We went through the whole "3-year summer" with the impression that the office was pretty much up for grabs by whichever faction was able to insert their own candidate. We were also left with the impression that the first two names that had been being spoken of regarding it were those of Dumbledore, who didn't want it, and

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Crouch who was no longer being considered.

In point of fact, there seems to have been no uncertainty regarding the office in 1982–'83 at all. It is altogether possible that Crouch's whole power grab was an attempt at a "palace coup" that failed. Which would further raise the likelihood that he had eventually been removed from his position at the head of the DMLE in order to keep him from being in a position to make further mischief. We have certainly heard no suggestion that the Death Eaters still in circulation at the time had a viable candidate of their own, and we know nothing whatsoever about the background of Millicent Bagnole.

Millicent Bagnole!? Who the hell is Millicent Bagnole?

Millicent Bagnole was the previous Minister for Magic. The one before Fudge. The one who seems (according to the WOMBAT information on Rowling's now long-departed first official website) to have taken office just before the end of VoldWar I. She certainly held the office back in the late 1980s. It says so right there in *Order of the Phoenix*.

We still have no idea who held the position during most of the war.



Which, at long last, brings us to Cornelius Fudge.

On my first reading of the series, like many others, by the end of *GoF* I was absolutely convinced that Fudge had been the Death Eaters' candidate, for he had certainly been their tool.

But, even before the release of *Order of the Phoenix* three years later, I was no longer so solidly convinced of this. For, while it is no mystery to any reader as to just whose pocket

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Fudge had been living in lately, or whose purposes his official actions or policies were serving now, there were clues scattered throughout the series up to that point which suggest that this had by no means always been the case. It even began to seem quite believable that Fudge might be neither "ever-so-evil" nor even simply "ever-so-stupid." It could believably have been that he really was merely "ever-so-weak-and-unlucky." Just how much do we really know of the man?

Fudge states, in the course of the *PoA* eavesdropping scene at the Three Broomsticks, that he was a Junior Minister in the Dept. of Magical Catastrophes on the day that Sirius Black was arrested, the day after Voldemort's fall, and that Fudge was one of the first people on the scene to witness the arrest. We don't know how long afterward the Crouch/Lestrangle trial took place, but I would imagine that it took place by the start of the following year.

There had certainly been no question of Fudge becoming Minister for Magic at that point. Even if the sitting Minister had been making any noises about retiring — which she wasn't, Bagnole had only taken office a year or so earlier — Crouch had seemed enough of a sure thing as the next choice for the top spot (particularly if the war had continued, he does sound like he was positioning himself as a "wartime Minister") that discrediting him might have left a fine window of opportunity for anyone who was poised to use it, but Fudge was far too junior a player at that point for it to have been him.

At the time of the Longbottom affair Fudge was largely unknown to the greater wizarding public. Inside the Ministry, his position was high enough for quite a few people to have

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some idea of who he was, but not high enough for many to really “know” him.

What is more; Fudge didn’t even become Minister for Magic until Harry was nearly ready to start Hogwarts.

That’s right. Not until 1990. Or, more accurately, “five years ago” from the vantage point of the beginning of the autumn term of Harry’s 5th year.

Admittedly, that little nugget of information was tucked into an article in the QUIBBLER, but the date that the current Minister for Magic took office is the kind of matter of public record that even the QUIBBLER is unlikely to have got wrong. And this information throws a number of people’s previous speculations about Fudge right out the window.

Rereading the Three Broomsticks eavesdropping scene in PoA, something else struck me.

Cornelius Fudge speaks with a remarkable degree of authority about James and Lily’s private lives and friendships. Things which do not make much sense coming from a casual observer. How would he know that?

I do rather think that unless Rowling was simply putting words into Fudge’s mouth because someone needed to say them and he happened to be there, or the private lives of the poor, tragic, young Potters was tabloid news for long enough that “everyone” knew these details — which doesn’t seem to be the case, since it is apparently NOT widely known that they were in hiding under the Fidelius Charm and that Black was supposed to have been their Secret Keeper — and Fudge admits that he was dropping classified information when he speaks of it — we may have been overlooking a fairly important

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clue. But I am unwilling to stake any specific amount on what it’s being a clue about. Possibly of nothing more than that we’re dealing with an author who has a weakness for cutting corners and indulging herself with episodes of “because I say so.”

Or that the Dept of Magical Catastrophes had made a fairly intensive investigation of the events that took place in Godric’s Hollow, which Fudge, reasonably highly-placed in the management of that Dept would have had access to, and enough interest in his own Department’s doings to have thoroughly made himself familiar with.

The fact that at that point in time just about everyone in the British WW had an intense interest in those events, of course had nothing to do with it.

Fudge had no doubt been eating out on the strength of such “inside information” for months afterward.



One possibility is that even though Fudge seems unlikely to have been a member of Dumbledore’s Order, he might well have been a lot more deeply in Dumbledore’s councils during VoldWar I, or since then, than we’ve otherwise been led to understand. If this is the case, that description of Dumbledore’s “suddenly looking at Fudge as if he had not seen him before” in response to Fudge having deliberately brought a Dementor into the castle in GoF may have a lot more context than a surface reading would give us. It is possible that Dumbledore has just realized that he just made another of his huge mistakes.

Albus hasn’t been *paying attention* to Fudge; and this inattention has unwittingly lost him an ally to subversion and he

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may be seeing ghosts of the past. In particular the ghost of a young man by the name of Peter Pettigrew. Dumbledore certainly adjusts his thinking without hesitation after realizing this, for by the time Fudge storms off in a huff Dumbledore is clearly convinced that Fudge is not to be trusted and is no longer surprised by any of Fudge's obstructionism.

But what now appears most likely to me is that back in the days that he was blamelessly fulfilling the peter principle in the Department of Magical Catastrophes, Cornelius Fudge was probably a fairly effective gatherer of information (he is certainly an incorrigible gossip). Much of the data regarding the Potters is likely to have been collected in the investigation of the damage to the House in Godric's Hollow, which his Department would reasonably have been called in to conduct. And he has forgotten little of that data in the ensuing 12 years. Although he had probably refreshed his memory by rereading all of the case files since Sirius's escape from Azkaban. I am growing inclined to think that a younger Cornelius Fudge was probably a passably honest civil servant, and a staunch supporter of the Ministry of the day, without the slightest suspicion of Death Eater associations to taint his reputation.

In those days, along with much of the rest of the wizarding public, he would have also been a great admirer of Albus Dumbledore. And for that matter, he has probably been dining out on his association with the Headmaster ever since he took office. But Fudge is not an intrinsically clever man, nor one of strong character. And he has a fatal flaw. He loves — truly loves — to be regarded as *important*.

It was not a hunger for Power, in the Slytherin style, that

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opened the way to the subversion of Cornelius Fudge. It is an abiding thirst for Glory, a characteristically Gryffindor weakness. Over the first four books Fudge has demonstrated at every appearance that he clearly delights in basking in the importance of being the Minister for Magic. He loves to address the public, to give speeches to the masses, statements to the press. He revels in being in the public eye and to be seen rubbing shoulders with the wealthy and influential. But until Dolores Umbridge started playing the Fisherman's Wife in year 5, he shows remarkably little eagerness for actually exercising the power to do what a Minister does — which is to impose legislation upon his constituency.

No, this he did not do until he was called upon to do so in support of one of his (comparatively few) personal allies — at which point he responded with blind faith in her reading of the situation. And I think that by the end of GoF, those few allies had become his handlers and controllers. And, to a large extent his wardens.



As to Fudge's steps leading downward;

In the first book we are told only that Fudge is a bumbler, deeply dependent upon Dumbledore's guidance, requesting his help at every turn. This becomes somewhat more understandable once we realize that he is rather young for his job, and it was his first year in office. And as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Dumbledore may effectively be his boss. Possibly even his patron.

The possibility that Albus, knowing that Voldemort's sup-

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porters were only an owl away, and that he could hardly ban Quirrell from the Owlery, may have dropped a hint that there was a slight chance of an increase in Dark Arts activity in the near future, also leads one to wonder whether many of the owls which Dumbledore received from Fudge over the year may have been related to the sudden upsurge in raids on the homes of suspected Dark wizards, undertaken on Fudge's authority.

In Chamber of Secrets, Fudge's instincts were still to blindly support Dumbledore. When first pressed, he even ineffectively attempts to oppose Malfoy, although he soon knuckles under to Malfoy's pressure.

He was still playing pig-in-the-middle at the opening of PoA. He approved Lupin's hiring, he brushed the Aunt Marge imbroglio under the rug. But he still surrounded the school with Dementors and he is beginning to act with more confidence in his own authority each time he comes on stage. Something or someone was clearly bolstering his self-esteem throughout this period. And I think that particular someone's name was probably Dolores Umbridge.

And she had help. Lucius Malfoy had suffered a major setback at the end of CoS when he was removed from the Hogwarts Board of Governors. From every indication at our disposal, I seriously doubt that the reason for his removal was made public. (And why the hell *not*?) From all subsequent indications, he seems to have been improving the shining hour since that point by making inroads inside the Ministry itself, using his son's injury by an enraged hippogriff as a pretext to camp out at the Ministry and get a handle on Fudge. And, perhaps more to the point, Fudge's personal staff.



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Crouch, who is no longer heading the DMLE by that time is not in a position to object to this breach of his old agreement with the Malfoys, since he himself is no longer in a position to protect Malfoy and his "clients" from Ministry raids. And besides, he can hardly fault a father for attempting to personally see to it that a dangerous beast which has injured his child is disposed of.

I think that this was the real turning point in Fudge's alliances, and I will go so far as to suggest that the main event that brought it about is that, behind the scenes, probably at some point during Year 3, Lucius Malfoy had managed to enlist the support of Fudge's chief assistant, Dolores Umbridge. Who has a great deal less general good-will than her boss, and is certainly far more ruthless.

I also very much suspect that Madam Umbridge has always cordially disliked Albus Dumbledore, loathed his values, and deplored his influence upon Minister Fudge. To be given tacit permission to take an active hand in lessening that influence would have been a goal right up her alley.

It was also during year 3 that Fudge was being encouraged to spend a great deal of his time in the company of Dementors "for his protection." This will hardly have had a beneficial effect upon his judgment, either.

Sirius Black's escape from Azkaban seems to have offered Malfoy a very nice window of opportunity. Just about every time we saw Fudge in PoA he had a Dementor or two in tow. I suspect that this was at Malfoy's urging, presenting the rationale that as a man who was on the scene at Black's capture, Fudge stood second in risk only to Harry Potter, and that as the



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guards of Azkaban prison the Dementors were the very best “protection” that a man in Fudge’s dangerous position would be able to find.

You cannot be around Dementors for any length of time without them having an effect on you. Even if they are not actively feeding on your emotions. By the end of the book Fudge’s judgment had to have become compromised by their continued presence. Nor do we know how long it took after Sirius’s escape from Hogwarts before Fudge dared to dispense with this “protection,” although he had better sense than to bring one to the World Cup. (At which point unmistakable Death Eater activity broke out and the Dark Mark was sent up over the campgrounds. Re-call the guards...)

By the fourth book Fudge is popping out with “Lucius Malfoy says” on just about every conceivable occasion, summoning Dementors and bringing them *into the castle*, and by the end of the book is vigorously opposing Dumbledore directly.

At which point Albus finally woke up and realized that the horse had disappeared over the horizon and the barn doors were standing wide open and undefended.

As to the other events of Goblet of Fire; I also rather suspect that Lucius Malfoy has a seat on the Board of the DAILY PROPHET, and it seems clear that Rita Skeeter’s nasty smear campaign painting Dumbledore as a senile old dingbat, and her gradual recalibrating of the public attention drawn to Harry Potter from Tragic Hero to “disturbed adolescent” over the course of year four was at Malfoy’s direction. Despite every opportunity to know better, I rather suspect that Fudge has always tended to believe whatever he reads in the PROPHET.



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I think it is abundantly clear, in hindsight, that Fudge had been well and truly got at, and that this probably had taken place fairly recently. Because — as he says himself at the end of Book 4, he *had* actively supported Dumbledore, and most of Dumbledore’s more controversial decisions right down the line, right up to that very point.

But for the past year and more, between Malfoy and Umbridge, they had Fudge surrounded, while Albus was taking him for granted. The silly little man never had a chance. And once Harry spilled the beans about a return of the Dark Lord, over Year 5 Malfoy and Umbridge, between them, were keeping Fudge on a very short leash.

This subversion was accomplished quite deliberately, and quite *recently*, and throughout the events of OotP, it is abundantly clear that Fudge was dancing to Dolores’s tune every bit as eagerly as to Malfoy’s. If not more.



Madam Umbridge is not an intelligent woman and she may be a crude plotter, but she is very quick to react to any new information that threatens her agenda (although she usually acts ineffectively and in excess of the actual requirements). Although we were given no clear indication that she knowingly supported Voldemort prior to DHs, the final book revealed that she may be related to at least one DE, and possibly several of them (I gather that Pottermore indicates not, but I do not regard Pottermore as even remotely canon). What was always evident, however, is that she was every bit as ready as the hardest-line Death Eater to use whatever methods appear to be the quickest means to



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bring about her goals. And the legality or ethics of those methods is immaterial to her.

Until DHs, (and more to the point, Pottermore) we did not even know whether Madam Umbridge was, herself, a pureblood witch — although we had been led to draw such a conclusion from her associations. But she could also have been one of those well-established halfbloods who the pureblood faction are so conspicuously gracious as to consider “useful.” They will have used this particular line of flattery before. Patronage is a very powerful tool. Particularly in a society such as that which runs the wizarding world.

What is unquestionable is that Madam Umbridge is not at all as clever as she thinks she is. Particularly once she starts dealing with people who are intellectually a few cuts above Fudge.

Her fixation on part-humans seemed odd, however. And appeared to be both a weakness, and a *very* curious one. We have no clear understanding as yet as to just how widespread this view — at her level of intensity — is within the WW, or whether this is a view particular to a specific faction within it. My own gut-level response was that it might have been a preoccupation of halfbloods who are grasping at the straw of their humanity as their own particular badge of superiority. (Although the existence of the likes of Fenrir Greyback at least explains the public’s horror of werewolves.) In the wake of DHs it is clear that Rowling has disappointed us by rendering it into merely another overwrought example of how bigotry is not nice, and only stupid people believe in it.

We did know that this was a view that is at least to some degree shared, but not whether Umbridge’s iteration of this

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obsession was an exaggerated form of this particular prejudice limited to herself, or whether there is an actual political faction which upholds such views and attempts to dictate Ministry policy accordingly. There were certainly enough people willing to go along with it once the DEs took control of the Ministry and gave Umbridge her own Department to run. How many of them were just “following orders,” we cannot say. But she blinkered herself with her prejudices even more thoroughly than does Professor Snape.

We also saw in OotP that once she was in an actual position of power, rather than merely as a trusted assistant who must answer to someone else for her actions, she was out of her depth and over the ensuing months managed to lose her head altogether. By the end of the book she had become a caricature of herself. (As happened again in DHs. Albus was certainly correct in that there are some people who simply cannot be trusted with power over others.)

If we can believe even a quarter of the Quibbler’s aspersions regarding Fudge’s dealings with the Goblins, it is beginning to look to me as if it may well have been Umbridge’s crowd who originally put Fudge into office.

With little or no opposition from either Malfoy (who hasn’t a seat on the Wizengamot) & Co., who saw little to object to, and much that they might ultimately be able to work with, or from Dumbledore, who saw a decent record in the Magical Catastrophes Department, and an affable, if admittedly lightweight character with a fair amount of personal good-will, who would, most important of all, be easily impressed, and willing to take direction. Fudge’s own background seems compatible with

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that of the more open-minded of the pureblood faction, at least as far as it applies to fully human wizards, even if his background is probably not up to the standards of the Blacks. I suspect very few of the current pureblood faction are up to the standards of the Blacks. His having been proposed for the position of Minister may even have originally been a sop to wizarding unity.

And Malfoy's faction evidently saw no reason to attempt to displace him, when subverting him was just as easily accomplished.

And, if Fudge turned out to be something that fell through the cracks while Dumbledore was occupied with Harry and Sirius Black, at least Dumbledore realizes this by the end of Goblet of Fire.



It was no surprise to me that the main conflict throughout Order of the Phoenix was not between Harry and Voldemort, but between Dumbledore and the Ministry. That situation was one that it appeared to be absolutely essential to reconcile before we were ever likely to see any possible progress on the flashier half of the problem represented by Lord Voldemort. Unfortunately, I expected that once it was reconciled, the situation we got would be an improvement.

No such luck. But at least Albus and his supporters were no longer effectively outlaws leading double lives.

The Ministry and Dumbledore were scarcely working together through HBP, but at least they were both on the same page over the need to address the problem of Lord Voldemort.

One question left unanswered is; If subverting Fudge was so



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easily accomplished, why did it take the Death Eaters so long to get around to it? He was in office for nearly three years before Malfoy put any determined efforts into it.

For that matter, if all it needed was to get one official in a key position under Imperius to take over the whole Ministry, why did it take the DEs two whole years to accomplish that?

And why didn't they do that in the first war?



We heard very little (and that little primarily from Draco) regarding Lucius Malfoy prior to CoS. At which point we learned that there had been a series of raids of suspected Dark wizard's homes. From then, until the end of OotP, even when he wasn't directly under our noses, Lucius Malfoy had been hovering about on the edges throughout every single book and there was simply no avoiding him. Well, now it seems we know why. As of the opening of CoS, the Ministry is being a nuisance, the Dark Lord and his own father are out of the reckoning. The way seems to be clear for Lucius to make his own bid for power, and he was putting his ducks in a row to do it.

Although once the Dark Mark went up over the World Cup campgrounds, he must have realized that his timing couldn't have been worse. But by then he was too committed to his own power grab to withdraw from it, and he knew that Voldemort would probably just co-opt any useful efforts he managed to set under way, and consider it his due.

If he was lucky, that is. He also has the loss of the Diary hanging over his head.

So he had just best soldier on and hope that he will be lucky.



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As for Fudge; clearly he knew nothing of Voldemort's impending return. How could he if his loyalty to Albus was only recently undermined by Malfoy? He does not bear the Dark Mark. He didn't even know what it was. And I do not think that Malfoy ever filled him in on just what their "mutual" objectives really were. It was *Malfoy* that Fudge had chosen to follow, not Voldemort.

As to the scene in the Hospital wing at the end of GoF, we're limited by Harry's reading of the situation, but the announcement of Voldemort's return seems to have genuinely stunned and appalled Fudge.

But the "strange smile" that Harry notes once Fudge realizes that Dumbledore is serious about Voldemort's return was highly disturbing. That was clearly the point at which Rita Skeeter's groundwork and Umbridge's undermining of Albus paid off. He is clearly now convinced that Albus is either slipping, or outright insane. And by the end of the confrontation Fudge is actively and consciously opposing Dumbledore with everything he's got. After that point Fudge only let his defenses down briefly in one last futile plea to get Dumbledore to say that it really wasn't so. And that single last plea makes the situation just all the more disturbing.

I think that it is pretty clear to the reader that at that point Fudge had solidly thrown in his lot with Malfoy.

Whether or not he believed he had no other choice is uncertain. Whether he suddenly realized that it might actually be possible to profit from supporting Voldemort, is even *less* certain, as well as far less likely. But he has probably always believed that he could profit from supporting Malfoy.



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And he had clearly chosen to cut himself loose from Albus. With prejudice.



Rowling stated in the World Book Day interview in March of 2004 that there was to be a new Minister of Magic before the end of the series. And most of us were sure this would come as a relief.

Our relief was short-lived.

Bringing us to Rufus Scrimgeour, former Head of Aurors, whom Albus Dumbledore flatly refused to work with from the get-go.

It is almost enough to force one to wonder if Dumbledore's determination to have Voldemort's return publicly acknowledged was a tactical blunder. Voldemort seemed to be willing to keep his head down and do nothing to rock the boat so long as the Ministry was prepared to deny that he was out there. But I daresay that wasn't a situation which we could have trusted to last much longer than it did. I suspect it may have been a tactical blunder for the progress of the books that it lasted as long as it did, too. But that is an issue for another day and another essay.

I will have to admit that over the course of HBP I found myself becoming ever more disturbed by the prospect of Rufus Scrimgeour.

More so than turned out to be warranted. But still.

I also still think that, properly handled, there wasn't a single function that the puppet Minister, Pius Thickness served in the series that Rufus Scrimgeour couldn't just as easily have performed. And done it better.



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The fact is that the very circumstances of Scrimgeour's appointment were already highly suspect. The Wizengamot's hand was clearly forced. And by the time the appointment had to be made, they didn't have a particularly broad field of choices did they? Someone had already made sure of that.

And over the previous year while the Ministry was doing a fine imitation of an ostrich, you have to wonder just how much the middle-management and 2nd-rankers in the organization had been watching their own backs.

Well, we know who was jerking Fudge's strings. If Malfoy had managed to survive the raid on the DoM without being captured, he might even have been permitted to go on doing it.

But we sure didn't know whether anyone was tugging on Scrimgeour's strings. Or who that anyone might have been. And I, for one, would certainly not have counted the possibility out.

Rowling doesn't seem to have thought of that. Which was a pity. We might have had a more believable story otherwise.

None of Scrimgeour's policies or actions since he took office seem to have really helped much, did they? A whole year of "new leadership" and the whole situation had only got worse. When you come right down to it, Scrimgeour's decisions were of even less practical use than Fudge's policy of official denial. All they seem to have done is frighten people.

In Fudge we have a rather silly, pompous, affable little man who clearly treats his staff extremely well, and trusts them implicitly. Percy Weasley, who worships competence and order idolized Crouch Sr, but he seems to have managed to sincerely like and respect Fudge as well. *sigh* We really ought to take more notice of Percy's opinions. Young as he is, he is turning



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out to be not so very *bad* a judge of character that he cannot recognize decent character even if it's weak. (Although he can certainly be deceived by female manipulations. Molly is a bully, not a manipulator.) And he is properly appreciative of any sort of kindness.

Rufus Scrimgeour was none of the above. His character was neither strong, *nor* good, for all that he could manage an *illusion* of strength. This was also a man who demonstrated that he would ruthlessly use his own staff's personal lives to further his own ends. Without compunction or regard for their circumstances, or their feelings. I do not think that Percy particularly respected Scrimgeour. He had already been handed good reason not to. And there was certainly no kindness *there*.

But Harry was wrong again when he hastily categorized Rufus Scrimgeour as "just like Barty Crouch." Scrimgeour wasn't *half* as effective as Barty Crouch. And I definitely don't think that he was the first pick for his job.

We don't know exactly what the hierarchy is in the MoM. But everybody's favorite candidate, Amelia Bones would have headed the short list for MfM after Fudge's ouster. In fact, she would have been far higher up the short list than Scrimgeour. She was head of the whole DMLE, He was just the Chief Auror or some such.

So, what if Amelia was already the designated new MfM? I'm pretty sure she was. Unofficially.

Well, she was murdered almost immediately after Fudge refused Voldemort's ultimatum to step aside in his favor, wasn't she? Before Fudge even officially resigned.

And Malfoy would have been in a position and very well able



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to report that Amelia looked like turning into a problem all the way back the previous summer, after she cast her vote at Harry's disciplinary hearing. I rather think she was on Voldemort's short list as well.

But Tom was prepared to keep his head down and not rouse any suspicions for as long as the Ministry would oblige him by refusing to admit that he was back. You'll notice that poor Amelia didn't survive a month after they finally admitted he was back. And it was rumored that he had killed her personally.

She had only been killed the previous week when Scrimgeour had his interview with the Muggle PM. And Scrimgeour had only just been drafted into the job. He was the Brand New MfM when he made that visit to Downing St.

He'd only had the position for a couple of days.

Indeed; that had been one hell of a busy week. Voldemort abruptly surfaced to demand that Fudge step aside in his favor, which was an outrageous enough demand for even Fudge to grow a backbone and refuse.

This was followed by two highly publicized murders, a very public collapse of a Muggle bridge and a Giant attack in the West Country. Fudge resigns in disgrace and the Wizengamot is caught on the hop, having to scramble to find a replacement. Of an unripe crop, Scrimgeour as head of the Aurors division looks like the best pick available. That could have been deliberate. Particularly if high-ranking open supporters of Albus Dumbledore had already been culled over the previous year.

Practically the first thing Scrimgeour does is to have a meeting that escalates into an altercation with Dumbledore. There was no hint of a blasted hand in the opening of the article

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reporting the disagreement, and one would think that someone would have mentioned that if Albus's misadventure with the Ring had happened by that time. A day or two after quarrelling with Dumbledore, Rufus sets up a meeting with the Muggle Prime Minister.

And for that matter, the whole situation with Scrimgeour just looks *odd* to me.

Scrimgeour seems to have parachuted into the MfM's office with no trusted staff of his own to support him. I have worked in Civil Service myself for long enough for that alone to look Damned Odd. The Chief of the Auror's division was high-ranking enough that he certainly *ought* to have a staff of his own. One he could depend upon. Was it suggested to him that he not take them with him? Or had he already alienated all of them?

Was it not *only* Albus who couldn't work with the man?

In fact, Scrimgeour was drafted into the top job and it was a sufficiently large leap in position that he not only inherited Fudge's staff, but Fudge *himself* was actually kept on as an advisor. I will hazard that that would NOT have been the case if it had been Amelia who was suddenly the new MfM. The Wizengamot may not have been giving Scrimgeour a full vote of confidence here.

And the tone of the whole action over HBP, and the (steadily eroding) relationship between Dumbledore and the Ministry would probably have been very different if Amelia Bones had been Minister.



But to my eye, that whole set-up in the Minister's office was

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suspiciously off-kilter.

Fudge *had* to resign. There was no way that he could have been kept on as Minister.

But the Wizengamot owes him. It was *their* directives that he had followed over the preceding year. They were willing to authorize all of those frivolous and pernicious educational decrees interfering with the operation of Hogwarts that he brought to them on Madam Umbridge's say-so. They *wanted* Dumbledore discredited, and Fudge served as their point man.

And we do not know whose doing on the Wizengamot it was to replace Fudge, with whom Albus was still, despite it all, probably willing to work, with Scrimgeour with whom he wouldn't.

Over year 6 I wouldn't have counted on the Ministry employees who are also members of the Order being able to continue to do double-duty unimpeded, either.

I certainly wouldn't have counted on Harry getting the enthusiastic support of the Ministry over the course of Book 7. Even if Scrimgeour had been still in place.

In the event, that last was one of the very few issues upon which Rowling actually managed to surprise me in DHs. And it was a straightforward case of; "fool me twice, shame on me." After having resoundingly had it proved that he had not been crying wolf all through year 5, I was sure that when Harry gave his account of what happened on top of the Astronomy tower he would be believed.

Well, surprise, surprise. Even before the Ministry fell, the PROPHEET was raking up the whole smear campaign from Year 4.

The Death Eaters found Fudge ridiculously easy to manipulate, but even they had to realize that no one was going to find

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him credible for the time being. Push him out, but leave him in the game. In the meantime, have a back-up plan to tide them over. I thought that Scrimgeour may have been their back-up plan. And he could have been utilized far better than he was. I find myself wondering whether Rowling just got tired of him.

The odd vibes we seemed to get from Scrimgeour could have been from simple insecurity. He had the high office. But he didn't seem to have any friends. And the way he was conducting himself in that office, he wasn't going to make any.

We also didn't know how many of Dumbledore's opponents/Voldemort's supporters were in the current Wizengamot, which had made that particular appointment.

I thought that once Scrimgeour put a foot wrong, he would be out on his ear, and Fudge might be back. By then people would remember that he had defied Voldemort's demand to step aside.

And Scrimgeour *would* put a foot wrong. He was a hollow man. Even if he hadn't been turned into an Imperiused DE puppet (which I thought was very likely). If Barty Crouch was fixated on catching just one more Dark wizard, Scrimgeour was fixated upon *appearing* to be trying to catch Dark wizards, more than he ever was on actually *catching* Dark wizards.

I am going have to say that by the end of HBP the Wizengamot, and indeed the whole Ministry clearly appeared to have already been badly compromised. We'd now lost Albus, his friends Ogden and Marchbanks may not have been able to reclaim their Wizengamot seats. And we'd lost Amelia Bones as well.

And we were never told who took any of their places.

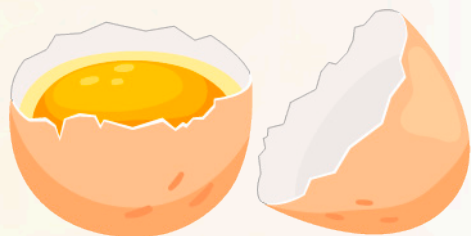
I really was not at all astonished when Imperius turned out

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to be a problem in the Minister for Magic's office before the end of Harry's minority. Fudge seemed as likely a victim as Scrimgeour, and Dolores is amoral enough to cast it. We don't know whether she is any *good* at it. But she seemed confident enough of being able to cast an effective Cruciatus to threaten Harry with it.

(And maybe, this time, I thought that Percy might finally prove himself on the side of the angels by figuring the situation out. I wasn't *completely* off with that guess. But Rowling doesn't seem to have considered it worth her while to go much of anywhere with it.)

So instead, we suddenly got lumbered with Pius Thicknesse, who was more hopeless than even Percy was willing to tolerate over the long haul. We really didn't need him. And I still rather think his introduction was a mistake.



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For a long time it was my conviction that once a situation was seen to have occurred in this series it was exponentially more likely to recur. By the end of HBP JK Rowling was turning out to be pulling remarkably few one-offs.

I'm not so sure that this observation still holds post-DHs. Rowling threw a busload of stuff at us in that book that seems to have come straight out of left field, but the observation certainly still applied to GoF, OotP and HBP.

In OotP she effectively retooled and reused the basic plotline from PS/SS. Tweaked and given some different emphasis, but with even most of the same basic situations reused as well.

But not all of them, it seems. There was one major situation in PS/SS that she *didn't* reuse.

So just what was this "situation" that occurred in PS/SS that did not get replayed in OotP?

Well, that's an easy enough question to answer.

The hostage situation.



I contend that much of the background tension of PS/SS is built upon the fact that Dumbledore and the staff were attempting to deal with a hostage situation — in addition to trying to trap Voldemort.

There is nothing remotely like a Hostage situation in OotP. Unless you want to count Sirius Black's raging case of cabin fever. Which I don't.

But Rowling had already reused that particular "situation". Prominently. In GoF.

In fact we got almost an exact reversal of PS/SS's hostage sit-

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uation in GoF. And we certainly got a reversal of its conclusion. In PS/SS they lost the hostage, but managed to keep Voldemort from returning. In GoF it went in the opposite direction. Tom returned, but they did at least manage to rescue Alastor Moody.

And I gradually came around to the idea that there is a strong possibility — even if not a certainty — that Albus and Snape already knew that they needed to do that, too. Rowling is probably never going to either confirm nor deny this reading. But going by what is actually in the books, it definitely plays.

After HBP, once I finally got off the fence concerning the loyalties of former Professor Snape, his role, and even more particularly, his *actions*, those actions over the course of GoF stood in need of some re-evaluation.

Because, once I was convinced that, yes, he was indeed a White Hat, some of those actions at first glance — or even second glance — now look a bit dicey.

Of course Rowling meant them to. She wanted to keep us all guessing.

But even from my position of having finally taken a stand on Snape's loyalties, I was still more than half convinced that the summoning of that Dementor was largely Snape's doing.



Of course, I also had come out of my first reading of GoF with the conviction that Fudge was, if not a Death Eater, at least a willing and knowing supporter of Voldemort and his aims. I still suspect that Fudge found *Malfoy's* openly stated claims regarding the proper hierarchies which should be maintained within the wizarding world attractive. Particularly if he

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personally was assured a place among the ruling class.

But by the time OotP's release was imminent, I wasn't so sure of Fudge's being "ever-so-evil" any more, and by the time I finished reading OotP I no longer believed that Fudge was himself numbered among, or had ever knowingly supported, Voldemort or the Death Eaters. And it is clear by the end of the first chapter of HBP that this was indeed the case.

The biggest reason to have even considered the possibility in the first place was the summoning of that Dementor.

And from what we now know of Fudge, it seemed a lot clearer to me that the presence of that Dementor was far more likely to be due to Fudge having been "played" by someone. It was surprisingly easy to "play" Cornelius Fudge. He is a very predictable little man. And the only person known to have been in a position to have played Fudge at the relevant time, in the proper manner to send him calling for a Dementor, appeared to be Severus Snape.

And if Snape was indeed the person responsible, there is something quite alarmingly efficient about how Snape managed to spread the damage across both of his principals' organizations by neutralizing Barty Crouch Jr at just that point in time, in just that particular manner. Dumbledore lost essential testimony of Voldemort's return and, incidentally, another opportunity to clear Sirius Black's name that night, given that Peter Pettigrew had been very much in evidence in that account. After the fact, Albus turned out to have lost a not insignificant part of his personal credibility as well. Voldemort, on the other hand, lost his "most loyal servant"

And what Snape gained by it was his entry back into Volde-

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mort's good graces.

Voldemort really was not stupid. Or, at least he wasn't at that point in the series. Even though he devolved into a total idiot later. But by neutralizing Crouch before he could be officially questioned, the news of Voldemort's return was confined to Harry's testimony and Dumbledore's support of it. And Malfoy, on his own behalf, had already taken steps to undermine public confidence in both of those.

From the other end of the equation, once the Potter boy managed to make his escape, all of Voldemort's plans had become completely derailed; throwing him into a situation for which he was not prepared.

And then, on top of that, his agent at Hogwarts managed to give himself away.

Snape's quick intervention bought him time.

Indeed, by all rights, Lord Voldemort ought to have been feeling very obliged to Severus Snape.

And by all accounts, since that evening, I think he was. Snape's subsequent position within the organization is evidence enough of that. I rather think that Snape had been a very minor cog in the DE's wheel the first time around — at least in Tom Riddle's estimation. And I thought that much of his enhanced status during VoldWar II might stem from the neutralizing of Barty Crouch.



After all, it was Snape that Dumbledore sent to tell Fudge that there was a captured Death Eater to be taken into custody. Which is exactly what he did.

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And if Fudge then shows up to do it with a Dementor in tow, rather than a team of Aurors, it is most likely to have been due to something that Snape told him, isn't it?

And it is not all that difficult to guess exactly what.

Consider; This was supposed to be an arrest, not an execution.

Crouch Sr is no longer the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and Amelia Bones has a very good track record for fairness. The wizarding world also hasn't been at war for over a decade. Even a suspected Death Eater ought to be assured of a proper trial.

An Azkaban escapee, however, is not.

From the precedent set in Book 3, apparently the only thing an Azkaban escapee is entitled to is the Dementor's Kiss. All Snape had to do was murmur — with absolute truthfulness — “escaped from Azkaban” to Fudge and the presence of a Dementor was assured. Fudge, after all, only knows of one Azkaban escapee.

Even if Albus *had* broached the subject of Black's possible innocence to Fudge before the current school year commenced, which still seems unlikely, Fudge had probably leaped to the conclusion that they had managed to recapture Sirius Black.

Upon the whole, and taking later events into consideration, I think that it was Lord Voldemort who came out very much ahead in that particular trade-off. Which is not a comforting thought.

On the other hand, Albus's own agent managed to settle into place in the middle of Tom's organization by the end of the evening, and there appears to be no suggestion in canon that Tom regarded Snape, or his loyalties, afterward, with any real

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degree of suspicion whatsoever.

But Tom was not really vulnerable enough for the Ministry to have been able to take him down at that point even if they'd had Crouch's testimony. As I've said elsewhere, I really did believe that at that point in time, Snape would have known about the Horcruxes. Rowling, however determinedly implies that he did not.

(Although Albus may well have *intended* for him to figure it out during that final year. The books regarding them had been left right where Snape, as Albus's successor could not fail to have found them. Albus didn't anticipate that Hermione would summon them through the open window and make off with them before Snape took possession of that office.)



For that matter; I am also not altogether convinced that Dumbledore and Snape were not already suspicious of "Moody" well before the night of the 3rd task.

Much of this possibility hinges upon how much information an active Auror like Moody might have had regarding the Dark Mark back during VoldWar I. Fudge — who came out of the Dept. of Magical Catastrophes, not Law Enforcement — knew nothing of how Voldemort had "marked" his followers, but the war had been over for nearly a decade before Fudge took office and he may simply never have been on a "need to know" list. Back in the war years, such information is likely to have been highly classified, if it was known outside the DMLE at all.

And yet, "Moody" had openly taunted Snape about his Dark Mark all the way back in January during the Christ-

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mas break. On the very same night that he had just raided Snape's stores of boomslang skin. That could have been a piece of carelessness which would have alerted both Snape and Dumbledore to the imposture.

Now that we know rather more about the mental acuteness of Severus Snape (even though Rowling does seem to have been determined to undermine it with a heavy application of terminal cluelessness in DHs — no one's mental facilities appear to have survived contact with DHs, apart from Neville, Luna and in some patchy instances, Hermione), can we really assume that having just come from his office, and the fresh discovery that someone has raided his store of boomslang skin, and then immediately afterwards to run slap into Alastor Moody (whose hip flask was legendary), with whom he then got into a pissing contest over Moody having searched his office earlier in the term, ending in his being taunted about his Dark mark, he might not have connected the dots? Up until DHs, Snape was very good at connecting dots.

What is more, Harry was not positioned where he could actually see both of their faces during that little contest when Snape and Moody attempted to stare each other down, after which Snape abruptly broke contact and stated that he was going back to bed.

Given the depth of the Dementors' effect upon young Crouch during his stint in Azkaban, I very much doubt that Crouch was a highly proficient Occlumens. He wouldn't have improved that skill hiding under an invisibility cloak in his father's house under Imperius, either.

Might Snape have taken the risk of briefly attempting to



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“read” Moody?

If so, the attempt was very brief, and probably wouldn't have revealed who this fellow was, but it might have shown him the theft of the boomslang skin, which the impostor had just accomplished, and was probably carrying concealed on his person, at that very moment.

Once the possibility of Polyjuice was in the equation, they might not know who the impostor was, but they would have known he was NOT Moody.

Instead, they knew that he had *captured* Moody.



Dumbledore and Snape already knew that Voldemort had managed to insert an agent to mess with the tournament. That was obvious from the minute Harry's name came out of the Goblet. It also tipped them off to the fact that Voldemort was running some kind of a scam of his own under cover of the event.

And, really, when you stop to consider it, their list of possible suspects was remarkably short.

This is Voldemort we are talking about. Assumed to be being assisted by Pettigrew. Both of whom have been out of touch for the past 14 years. Can anyone really imagine that anybody other than Harry and his friends might assume that their enemy agent was one of the foreign *students*?

Don't be ridiculous. Harry and his friends might have believed that, but I doubt that Snape or Albus would have.

How were Tom and Peter supposed to have even been able to guess which foreign students were going to be selected as candidates to compete? For that matter, the Hogwarts stu-

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dents weren't any more viable as suspects, or at least not as suspects for serving as Tom's agent. Nor any of the established Hogwarts teachers, either.

There were never really more than three people on that suspect list. Igor Karkaroff, whose past associations were already a matter of public record; Madame Maxime who is obviously half Giant. Giants had supported Voldemort last time round — although I would guess that Madam M was only included on the suspect list as an outside possibility, for the sake of “completeness.” And, now, Professor Moody. And with the suggestion of polyjuice in the equation, Moody has just jumped to the head of the list. Who on earth would think that impersonating Karkaroff was a good idea? He was already a suspicious character without adding the complication of Polyjuice to the equation. And Post-DHs we are informed that Polyjuice doesn't work on half-Giants. Which raises the probability that you cannot Polyjuice yourself into one, either.

There were initially a couple of other outsiders like Barty Crouch Sr and Ludo Bagman who were on the list as well, back when the issue of Harry's name in the Goblet was first raised, since they had both been at the school during the period that the Goblet had been taking names. But they weren't on site full time, and while you couldn't completely dismiss the possibility that someone from the Ministry might be involved, they were both essentially also-rans. Even Rita and her photographer didn't show up until after Harry's name had already come out of the Goblet.

We've got a couple of other variables in the equation as well. Crouch Jr had also been out of touch for over a decade, and

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we don't know what the relationship was between Snape and the real Moody by the opening of Year 4. It has been hinted that Albus kept Snape's function as a spy quite separate from the actions of the Order. It was also strongly implied that at the end of the war Moody had not been convinced of Snape's loyalties, not having ever been in a position to have seen them demonstrated. But by this time, who can say?

"Moody" may have given himself away in other small details already.

The real Moody was openly skeptical when Dumbledore vouched for Snape in the Pensieve memory of Karkaroff's plea bargain hearing. But that took place more than a dozen years earlier, and the story that Dumbledore and Snape have always given out was that Snape had turned himself in to Dumbledore in remorse, and turned his cloak as well, when he had been hired on as a teacher. At that point, that had been only a matter of some 7–8 weeks earlier. I'd have been skeptical, too. Moody didn't know at that point that Snape had probably been working for Albus for at least several months longer than that.

But that memory was from quite a while ago. Snape has been reporting on Malfoy and his associates on Dumbledore's behalf ever since, and the real Moody may know this. And Snape's information no doubt had proved extremely useful in the mopping up period after Godric's Hollow. Tom wouldn't have known whether Snape and Alastor Moody were interacting by Harry's 4th year. Nor would Pettigrew. And, more to the point, neither did Crouch Jr, unless he thought to question his prisoner about it. Which, unfortunately, he probably did. But he was still improvising.

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And for all that Barty Jr had no doubt known the old Auror very well, through his father, once upon a time, and for all that he still had the real Moody available for questioning, he may still conceivably have overplayed his role. Taunting Snape about the Dark Mark could have been a mistake that set Snape on his guard. In fact we saw Snape immediately retreat behind the usual, blank, Occlumency mask that he wears in the presence of fellow DEs as soon as "Moody" brought the subject of the Dark mark up.

Or at any rate he wore that mask until he caught sight of the Marauders' Map and went off on another of his "This all has to do with Potter!" rants. Misdirection, perhaps? Could be. It worked, too.

It certainly misdirected Harry.

To the point of entrusting False!Moody with the Marauders' Map.



Snape wore that same mask through much of the Spinners' End chapter of HBP as well, and it was evidently familiar enough that neither of his guests appear to have been made suspicious by it. He did not typically wear that mask at Grimmauld Place. That really ought to have given us some hint as to who he considers to be "safe" to reveal his own feelings around.

For another thing, we don't know how many different potions might require boomslang skin. If it's a necessary component of half a dozen fairly commonly used ones, then the conclusion to draw from a raid on it is not as obvious to the characters as it would be to the readers. But the fact that it is not in the students' supply cupboard argues against it being broadly useful in a wide variety of potions.

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One also has to ask whether Snape informed Dumbledore of the raid(s) on his supply of boomslang skin. But once I got off the fence and declared him to be a White Hat, I have to conclude that he probably did.

And for that matter, Snape may have decided to “use” his Dark mark to signal to a possible DE colleague by rubbing his left arm, as he was observed to have been doing in the Egg and the Eye conversation with Moody, possibly to see whether Moody would respond to his gambit.

Which he did, by taunting Snape about “spots that don’t come off.”

The likely presence of polyjuice in the equation combined with the visible presence of Moody’s hip flask and the taunt about the Dark Mark would have offered a difficult conclusion for Dumbledore not to draw. Did Albus manage to miss it?

I doubt it.



What is more, I suspect that before the night of the 3rd task their list of suspects had already been narrowed down to one, and that Albus had a very good idea of just who the impostor might actually be. He did, after all, send Minerva to fetch Winky, well before Crouch’s Polyjuice had worn off.

For that matter, I think we were all given a solid clue as to the direction of Albus’s suspicions when Harry fell into the Pensieve. Even if it was the kind of clue that is only interpretable in retrospect.

We watched three courtroom dramas. Karkaroff’s plea bargain hearing, Ludo Bagman’s trial, and the trial of the

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Lestranges and Barty Crouch Jr.

It’s easy enough to understand why Albus might be reviewing his recollection of Karkaroff’s plea bargain. And it might make sense to take another look at Bagman’s trial as well, so long as he’s at it, since they have been dealing with Bagman over the course of the year as well. Plus, I rather think that the point of both those exercises may have been that Albus had been sitting near the real Alastor Moody at both of those proceedings, so he could take stock of his recollection of Moody’s responses during those proceedings, in addition.

But under normal circumstances, why would he have wanted to review the Crouch/Lestrangle trial as well? Crouch’s son was believed dead. The Lestranges were still safely in Azkaban. Alastor Moody was nowhere to be seen during the Crouch/Lestrangle trial, so Albus wasn’t watching that one to refresh his recollection of Moody’s comments regarding it.

Well, also at that point in the story, Crouch himself had allegedly just been seen on the school grounds. Acting very strangely, too, babbling about his brilliant son, and then had mysteriously disappeared. But recollections of his son’s trial more than a decade earlier, could have had little relevance about the whereabouts of Barty Crouch Sr now could they?

So why was Albus Dumbledore reviewing the trial of a presumably dead man?

Had Dumbledore already figured the whole puzzle out before “Moody” made his final move? (Which might explain why he oh-so-briefly left Harry alone with Moody, as bait, after the return from the graveyard, and why he and his lieutenants went straight to Moody’s office after Harry disappeared

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the second time.) Dumbledore, did, at that point in the series, appear to have a thing for catching his enemies in the act, or you would think that they might have simply cornered “Moody” at any point during the year and confiscated his hip flask until the Polyjuice wore off.

On this head, I think that their problem may have been that once they concluded that polyjuice was in the equation, they knew they had another hostage situation on their hands. They knew that the real Alastor Moody was likely to be imprisoned somewhere in the castle. And they did not want to risk losing another hostage the way they lost Quirrell.

Of course they also couldn’t be altogether certain that whoever “Moody” was, that he was working alone. They may have had expectations of an on-site conspiracy to juggle, and wanted to be able to identify the impostor’s accomplice(s) as well.

As in the case of Quirrell, however, they could be reasonably certain that the DE, whoever he was, would try very hard to keep Moody alive. But I’ll have to say that Albus certainly made a piss-poor job of any effort to rescue him, if that’s the case. Confiscating the hip flask for an hour or two would have made a lot more sense.

[Side note: I am inclined to believe that a good deal of the reason that Crouch and Pettigrew were able to subdue Moody so readily was the shock effect of Moody’s finding himself under attack by two “dead” men. Ghosts cannot perform spells. They may well have managed to get closer to him on that account than two strangers might. Moody had known Pettigrew reasonably well back in the days of the Order, and he certainly would have known his former boss’s son. And we don’t know

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that Albus had ever filled Moody in on Pettigrew’s betrayal of the Potters, or his escape.]



And for that matter, now that we come right down to the nub of it; does it strike anybody else that the whole “Confession of Barty Crouch Jr” is a thoroughly unconvincing piece of work? Upon consideration there seems to be an awfully lot less to that confession than meets the eye.

In fact that whole sequence, once closely examined, collapses like an underdone soufflé when you slam the oven door. Try analyzing it and you end up suspecting everybody. Of terminal incompetence at the very least. Albus most of all.

Although by this point I am mostly inclined to suspect Rowling herself of a stretch of clunky plotting than any of her characters of anything halfway coherent. GoF was the point that the series began running off the rails, and in retrospect it shows. Relevant pieces were certainly all there, she could have put them together into a coherent narrative. But she simply didn’t. I suspect we are dealing with the results of a major case of burnout. One that was with us to the end of the series.

We probably also need to remind ourselves that part of this difficulty may have come about as a result of the alleged patch job that she found herself having to do 2/3 through the writing of this particular volume of the story, but if so we don’t know what part. (I have heard it rumored that Impostor!Moody was a late addition to the plot and not a part of the original outline. I’m not sure that I believe it.) But that whole “confession” seems to have been a piece of misdirected answering,

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that does not even account for what we saw happening over the course of the book.

In the first place; can anyone tell me what Dumbledore got out of that confession that he could actually *use* for anything? He already knew that Voldemort was back. He already knew that Pettigrew was alive. And what good does it do anyone to have the details of how the late Barty Crouch Sr sprung his wayward and unrepentant son from Azkaban? Albus couldn't even use that information to clear Sirius Black.

The only thing Dumbledore got from the exercise was a confirmation of his suspicion that the missing Bertha Jorkins was toast, and to find out what Barty had done with his father's body. Sure, on first reading, it was all very satisfying to know just how it happened — assuming that any of it was *true*, which I no longer do — but what good is any of that going to do for us against Voldemort's *future* plans — of which we learned absolutely nothing? At the end of that session I really don't find myself with a lot of respect for Dumbledore's skill or technique in interrogation.

For that matter, there are also a lot of very peculiar *omissions* from that confession. Particularly when one considers that the subject of it was allegedly drugged to the eyes with truth serum. Can we be all that sure that we really *do* know "how it all happened"?



And, do you know; back in the days that I was still sitting on the fence over the question of Snape's loyalties, I just wasn't at *all* astonished to learn in passing toward the end of OotP that

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Professor Snape keeps false Veritiserum in his stores as well as the real stuff.

I also remembered that before Dumbledore sent Snape off to find Fudge, Dumbledore had sent Snape to fetch the Veritiserum — which Snape did, with all haste — once he managed to tear himself away from the sight of his own face in Crouch's foe glass. (Is that why he arranged for a Dementor? Just in case Crouch had recognized his face in the foe glass — as an enemy — and reported it to Voldemort? Snape had a lot to lose if his cover was blown, and the foe glass was evidence of a sort that might be hard to explain away.) But I can't hang any convincing theorizing on that particular hook from the vantage point of the end of HBP. Nor post-DHs.

Still, either Barty Crouch was even cleverer and more in control of his responses under Veritiserum than we have credited him with being, or there must have been something wrong with that particular batch of the stuff. Because his claims of how it all came about just don't add up with what we watched take place over the course of the book.

Or else Barty Jr was completely off in his own separate reality, and, however sincere, we can't rely on anything he had to say for himself being supported by the facts.

Delusion may be a perfectly viable way to bypass the effects of Veritiserum, after all.



I mean, really. When you look back after finishing Book 4, doesn't it strike you as just a bit overly fortuitous that Crouch Jr had somehow managed to slip his leash and send up the Dark

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Mark over the World Cup campgrounds, forcing his father to publicly dismiss his House Elf, in order to save face, right at that *particular* moment?

It's almost like he knew someone was waiting in the wings for her to be gone...

Like, at the very least, he'd been given an inspirational pep talk quite recently. And doesn't it also strike you that his father's long-established Imperius which had "quite suddenly" weakened, had weakened just a little *too* suddenly?

Doesn't the timing for everything to do with the whole adventure at World Cup and Barty Jr's rescue from his father's house sound just a little bit too *convenient* to you?

Isn't it an awfully big coincidence that Barty Jr should have managed to fight his way clear of the effects of the curse *right* at the point when he just happened to see a kid's wand that he could steal?

Or that he and Winky should *just happen* to both be stunned so she couldn't get him away from the site after he sent up the Dark Mark — and that she should *just happen* to be found with the suspect wand in her hand, causing her master a public embarrassment resulting in her dismissal?

And yet Barty Jr says nothing of how Winky came to be found holding the stolen wand. *She* certainly hadn't stolen it.

And on the other end of the equation, does it really seem likely that Voldemort and Wormtail should have placed such absolute confidence in Providence as to leave the whole matter up to *chance* that it would all just naturally work out to their convenience without any action on their part?

Just how many coincidences are we supposed to swallow here?



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Crouch Jr's version of these events — given while "under Veritiserum" — omits any suggestion of there being any influence from outside the Crouch household in the equation until the night that Voldemort showed up in the arms of his servant Wormtail, put Crouch Sr under Imperius and rescued young Barty. But the actual timing of all these events immediately starts looking highly suspicious under any kind of an examination.

I'll ask you again; is it likely that for such a vital part of their overall plan as springing Barty Crouch from durance vile under his father's domination — which they must have realized couldn't be accomplished until the Elf was out of the way — that *anything* would be left to chance? We're talking about Lord Voldemort here. You know, the guy with the weakness for absolutely Byzantine plots.

And this plot, moreover, is one that requires hair-trigger timing.

Crouch states that he and Wormtail had prepared the polyjuice Potion which was used for his imposture of the real Alastor Moody in advance. This is faulty timing. By the point of Harry's dream/vision of Frank Bryce's murder at the opening of the book we are told that there was only a fortnight left before he was due to return to school, and that was shortly *before* the World Cup and its aftermath.

Being swept off to take part in the World Cup adventure covers the next three days, and then we are blithely led to understand that the uproar at the Ministry that followed covered not much more than a week.

In his "dream" of Frank Bryce's murder, Voldemort and Wormtail were newly returned to England. Voldemort also



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stated that they would be staying in the Riddle House for perhaps a week. He said that their next move would take place after the Quidditch World Cup was over. (In fact, *immediately* after it was over.) But we don't know that they actually held to that schedule.

But, polyjuice — as we know from CoS — needs to brew for close to three weeks before it is ready for the final ingredient. Moody was attacked and captured the evening of August 31; the night before the Trio boarded the Hogwarts Express, which was the very last chance that Tom and Co had in which to do it. That batch of Polyjuice had to have been started no later than about August 10. So right there Rowling has lost track of the calendar and we are left with a knot in the timeline.

Admittedly, Polyjuice has a fairly long shelf life. Moody's supply that Hermione appropriated after Moody's death at the end of July in '97 lasted the trio until after Easter. Peter could have easily purchased some in Albania — where he would be less likely to have been recognized — and they brought it with them when they returned to Britain. But that isn't what Barty tells us.

In any case, it sounds very much as though Barty Crouch Sr got very little more time than the minimum needed to shepherd his party home from the campground and to send Winky packing before he found himself under attack.

And that timing just doesn't sound accidental to me. Not at all. So. No. I'm not sure I buy that confession. Not at face value.



Admittedly, Crouch Jr may have been fighting his way out from under Imperius for a while, and it may have gotten easier

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once Voldemort was vestigially back on the material plane and had returned to Britain, but I think it is really unlikely that he was still under the curse at all on the day of the World Cup. I rather think that somebody had lifted it from him during the night before and whispered some instructions regarding his assignment to do something to make his father dismiss the Elf. I suppose it is possible that he may have been only subliminally aware of it. Or believed that he was merely dreaming of escape.

I also think that Barty Jr knocked Winky out during the confusion himself, put the wand in her hand, and left her to try cover the situation while he pretended to be unconscious. Winky lied in her teeth trying to protect her Master's secret, but she is a very poor liar and I'm not at all sure she even realized that it was her Master's son who had stunned her.

After all, it is plain to see in retrospect that the whole point of the Dark Mark incident was to create a situation which would force Crouch Sr to dismiss his Elf. There is no way that Peter and Tom, in his vestigial state would have been able to overpower Crouch Sr if Winky had been there to assist him.

Which raises the thin possibility that Malfoy's little diversion of Muggle baiting, and setting up his publicity smear campaign with Rita may have also been something less than totally fortuitous. But there seems to be a very real limit to how far one can carry any conspiracy theory in Rowling's Potterverse. Ms Rowling apparently doesn't think in terms of conspiracy theories and keeps spoiling everybody's fun. Plus, the Muggle-baiting at the World Cup really could be a coincidence. Or a part of somebody *else's* plot.

Besides which, we have also stubbed our toes on the fact

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that in both OotP and HBP there is a point in the plotline that you just have to throw up your hands and accept the presence of a totally uncontrolled random element in the mix. It wouldn't be unreasonable to have to do the same for GoF as well, and Lucius Malfoy's Muggle-baiting party is a good candidate for it.

I suppose we do have the option of thrashing out a reading in which Peter and Tom were lurking at the World Cup themselves, under Polyjuice. Tom seems to be under no misapprehension as to who was in charge of that Muggle-baiting stunt and there was no time for anyone else to have told him or Peter about it. Tom also seems to have spoken with no one but Peter and the two Bartys for the duration of the year, and none of those had taken part in the incident to be able to say for sure that it was Malfoy in charge of it. The Bartys may have had their suspicions, however.

In any event, the rescue of Barty Crouch could proceed no further as long as Winky was still in place. I also rather think that Voldemort and Wormtail were already lurking on the Crouch property when the party returned from the campgrounds and were only listening for the *pop* which would have signaled Winky's departure to effect their rescue of Barty Jr.

In fact, I rather suspect they may have been lurking on that property since the night before.



So.

Was Barty Crouch Jr's confession just a superb actor's last performance?

Or a completely delusional rambling unsupported by fact.

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Considering my conclusions regarding Snape's loyalties, it is difficult to account for the inconsistencies. Barty just plain seems to have had far more control over what and how much information he gave away in that soliloquy than he ought to have had if he really was under the influence of a truth serum. There are probably all sorts of reasons that Veritiserum testimony is not accepted as evidence by the Wizengamot.

But, that "confession" certainly advanced Crouch Jr's own agenda more than it advanced Dumbledore's. Readers are still taking young Barty's word regarding his father's character and actions on faith solely because the information was given out while "under Veritiserum"

So. Was Barty Jr told to send up the Dark Mark at the World Cup with a view to disgracing his father? And, just incidentally, also sending out a public stand-by alert to Voldemort's remaining supporters in a place where a significant number of them were probably all gathered to see it?

Did Barty Jr have help weakening his father's Imperius in order that he would be free and clear-headed and able do his part right at that particular time?

Was the Crouch household actually under attack by subversion *before* the World Cup?

Just how often did Winky check that house for *rats*?



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Very much to my surprise this essay needed almost no reworking after the release of DHs. Virtually nothing in DHs contradicts any of my observations of the story's development up to the point that the situation of Harry, Snape, and the Occlumency lessons arose.

The underlying business of the connection between Tom and Harry was certainly raised again in DHs, but under sufficiently different circumstances that I think it would be better to examine that separately, somewhere other than in this essay.



The Occlumency lessons, and the alleged reason they were introduced appear to be utterly central to the action in OotP. Not to mention that those Occlumency lessons were the only real point at which Harry was connected to anything that was going on beyond the walls of Hogwarts that year.

Nevertheless, upon my first rereading of HP and the Order of the Phoenix I'd no alternative but to suspect that the whole sequence concerning our trip into Snape's Pensieve was a deliberate set-up.

Nothing in HBP convinced me otherwise. (And even DHs hasn't sunk that reading.) What is more, I began to pick up indications that I might really be onto something, although it could still have all turned out to be hallucinations. And even if it wasn't, it might not add up to what I was inclined to suspect it did.

But, at that point, I couldn't believe that particular demonstration had anything whatsoever to do with Snape's worst memory.

Of course, back in the days of OotP we did not yet know

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about the additional twist to that incident, namely that James was using Severus's own magic against him, "giving him a dose of his own medicine," which would have upped the odds of the incident ranking closer to the top of Snape's little list. And I supposed that it was just possible that public humiliation really *is* the worst thing that Snape could conceive of ever happening to him. He is extremely jealous of his dignity, after all.

— But if that's the case, and that was the worst thing to have ever happened to him, I'd suggest a major scaling-back of one's general expectations of his actual involvement with the Death Eaters might be in order. Maybe he really was just off in a lab somewhere brewing illegal potions. But I'd hate to bet the farm on it.

Also at that point we also didn't have any official hint of the alleged Snape+Lily childhood friendship. In fact, even at the end of the series we'd seen so little hint of anything of that nature on Lily's side that by this time I frankly don't believe it ever was a *real* friendship. Not on her side, at least. And if it wasn't, and that was the best that Snape had to compare with, how would Snape have been expected to know the difference?

Furthermore, by the time DHs was pending, I was also wibbling over whether John Granger might be onto something in a theory that he had posted on his blog earlier in the year.

Just the prompt of the title of his posting (Tom Riddle's Scar-O-Vision) was enough to nudge me. Although perhaps in a different direction from the one John took.

But, even post-DHs and upon even further consideration, the whole Occlumency lesson sequence *still* feels like a deliberate set-up. The only thing about that sequence that I cannot account for is that I still cannot see any clue as to how Mon-



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Montegue managed to reappear so very fortuitously in order to facilitate it.



Even leaving the extraordinary convenience to Professor Snape in the timing of Montegue's miraculous reappearance out of the equation altogether, there is still something decidedly off about Montegue's return. In fact, there is something distinctly off about Montegue's whole adventure.

The twins admitted (to their friends, not to the staff) stuffing him headfirst into a vanishing cabinet when he tried to deduct some House points from them, and he eventually shows up — a day or two later — stuck in a toilet.

Now, getting Montegue stuck in a toilet is precisely in the Weasley twins' style — but if they had known that would be the result you can be sure that they would have been crowing about it. Yet they weren't.

While we are at it; we also never hear of the twins coming up against any particular consequences for having stuffed a fellow student into that vanishing cabinet, either. And we *ought* to have.

Montegue turns up "confused." Evidently we are just supposed to believe that he is too confused to say what happened to him, or who was responsible. And to understand that he remains too confused to give any information about it to the end of the year — a couple of months later.

Just from being trapped in a cabinet? And how did he get from the cabinet to the toilet? Something about that story simply does not add up.

And we'd all seen something along the lines of this kind of

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memory damage before. More than once over the course of the series, Most recently in this same book, in fact, just the previous week, in Dumbledore's office.

More to the point, we'd known since the end of CoS (and got a hefty reminder just the previous Christmas break) about the kind of damage an inexperienced Obliviate can do. I would say that Montegue has clearly been Obliviated. And probably not by someone who was an expert at that spell. (Who can say, maybe the twins *did* Obliviate him, before they stuffed him into the cabinet. Or at least Confunded him.)

I went into HBP determined to watch for anything that might shed some light on this issue. And to do the same afterwards in Book 7, if it didn't show up in Book 6. Nothing ever came up in either book that would clarify it.

But the explanation (or lack of it) that Rowling finally gave us raises far more questions than it answers. So I'm not sure that I can believe her explanation. It doesn't make sense. And it contradicts everything she's told us about Apparition and Hogwarts over the entire series.

Not to mention the *inexcusable* negligence of the Hogwarts staff under Albus Dumbledore's leadership (and probably Armando Dippet's as well), of leaving a *known* vanishing cabinet on display in a public area in a school. That cabinet has been referred to as a "vanishing cabinet" since we first heard of it in passing in CoS. So there was no mystery about its potential function. Not only was this a breach of basic security, but it would appear that no one seemed to be aware of where what would be vanished by it went.

And not only that, but when the cabinet was smashed by

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Peeves, the physical case was repaired, and the cabinet left in place without even testing whether the charmwork was still functional or subject to engaging at random without the proper activation phrase.

Explain to me, please, just how leaving a potential trip to nowhere out where students can lark about with it, and bullies can dispose of their enemies/targets with impunity shows a justifiable concern for the safety of the students with which they have been entrusted on the part of the staff.

I know that by the time we reached OotP the series had run off the rails and Rowling was inventing explanations and excusing the inexcusable, but this is beyond the pale.

I swear, the Carrows openly endangered the students from the day they took up their posts, but that was only a matter of type. Not degree.

According to Rowling's explanation in HBP (via Malfoy); Montague, it now seems, was not Obliviated, after all, nor, apparently was he really even confused. He was simply *not talking*.

Or at least he was not talking whenever anyone in any kind of position of authority at Hogwarts was asking him questions. Or, perhaps he was just not talking to anyone who might have let the story out where it could get back to Harry. We are rather limited here by the Harry filter.

But, evidently, as soon as everyone's backs were turned, and Montague was safely on the London-bound Hogwarts Express he couldn't wait to share the whole story with a group of his fellow Slytherins.

Excuse me? What is the motivation here? Why didn't he nail the Weasley twins for having entrapped him. They were still at

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Hogwarts when he made his reappearance. They trapped him in a cabinet long enough for him to have come to physical harm (unless he was really good at summoning food and water into his prison). So, upon escaping, was he delirious from dehydration? Having a hypoglycemic episode? Is that why he was "confused"?

And why is his story not more widely known if he told it to a group? Even if the full implications of the story, he — and most of his audience — was evidently not aware of. Were they mostly fellow 7th-years who wouldn't be back either? (Query: Montague was stated as being a 7th year. He sat his NEWTs in that condition?)

And if he would tell a group — and apparently he *did* tell a group, for Draco states that "everyone" thought it was a really good story — why had he not told the authorities? And why did he not tell the authorities, *immediately*?

Why the silence? Not for the twins' sake, certainly. Montague could have gotten the Weasley twins into real trouble if he'd spoken up. Particularly since they were of age and with Umbridge in control of the school. He could have got them expelled. Or arrested. By the time he went into that cabinet Dumbledore was already gone and Umbridge was in charge. Under those circumstances, why would he *not* speak up?

No, I'm sorry, this does not hang together at all. If this was Montague's own decision, it is "idiot plot" behavior in spades. And not the only piece of that kind of thing we've been handed either.

What I now suspect is that he *did* tell someone in authority. He told Snape. And Snape strongly advised him to keep it under his hat. It really makes much more sense to believe Montague was warned off from speaking of the matter by someone

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whom he did not especially want to cross. Somebody like his own Head of House.



Even more of a stumper; Montague claimed to have finally escaped from the cabinet by *Apparating* out of it, and getting himself stuck in the toilet in Hogwarts. Excuse me, but how many times have we been told that *you cannot Apparate* in or out of Hogwarts? And if you can Apparate from place to place *inside* Hogwarts, why has this not been discovered and rediscovered by any clever 6th or 7th year from time immemorial?

And Rowling clearly expects us to just swallow this down and not ask questions. Sorry, but I'm just not that unobservant. Or that forgetful. Maybe this is supposed to be a clue. To what, I can't even imagine. Maybe a clue that Montague — or Malfoy — or *Rowling* — was just plain *lying*. About *something* anyway.

Post-HBP, it becomes fairly easy to see Snape's fine italic hand in Montague's refusal to say anything about the matter until he boarded the Hogwarts Express for his last ride home to London. Which is when Draco got hold of it.

Snape would not have wanted that story spread around the school.

I now suspect that Snape did convince Montague to confide in him after he extracted Montague from the toilet, because it now really does seem to be outside any kind of probability for Albus not to have known that *something* was up with that lacquer cabinet from a very early point in year 6, if not before the end of Year 5. I now think that Snape tipped Albus off to the fact that the (damaged) cabinet had figured in Montague's

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disappearance as soon as Albus returned to the school in the aftermath of Umbridge's adventure with the Centaurs and Harry's raid on the DoM. If my original suspicions of the cabinets' original ownership is anything like correct, Phineas Nigellus's portrait would probably have also confirmed the purpose of those cabinets.

And if not Phineas Nigellus Black, then possibly the portrait of whichever *other* former staff member had introduced that cabinet to Hogwarts. For it certainly didn't get there by itself.

And Snape, recognizing that the information was a potentially dangerous, security breach would have advised/warned Montague to not spread the story around. And he didn't.

Until he boarded the Hogwarts Express.

None of which, however, advances any suggestion explaining the outrageous convenience of the timing of Montague's return from that particular adventure. I'm still completely at sea regarding that.



As for Professor Snape and the business with the Pensieve, that's a different class of knot to unravel. But at least that knot *can* be unraveled. First off, you have to find the right end of the thread.

Snape does not appear to have been under suspicion by either of his "principals" during Book 5, but he had to be well aware that he was walking the razor's edge. And you would expect that being instructed to teach Harry Occlumency must have put Snape into an intolerable position, vis-a-vis his relationship with Voldemort. There appears to have been more going on at

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that end of the equation than Dumbledore is presumed to have been aware of, regardless of whose side Snape was on. Or so one would be led to believe. At least at first glance.

But, then again, particularly where Snape is concerned, appearances tend to be deceiving, and Albus was very good at encouraging people to lead themselves up the garden path.

At first glance, his order that Snape teach Harry Occlumency seems to have been yet another of Dumbledore's smaller mistakes, although given Dumbledore's wariness about making eye contact with Harry since long before he claims to have believed that Riddle was aware of their mutual connection, it is easy enough to see at least one convincing reason why he might have given that order. The longer he could keep Voldemort distracted and occupied by the red herring of the record of the Trelawney Prophecy, the better. And if Tom was nodding in and out of Harry's head all year, Albus could hardly teach him the skill himself without taking too big a risk of compromising his bluff.

But Albus wouldn't look Harry in the eye all the way back as early as the disciplinary hearing in the middle of August. He later claims to have seen a shadow of Tom looking out of Harry's eyes off and on *all* through the year, not just after Christmas. Hold that thought.

Harry, with his open connection to Voldemort, appears to have been the weak link in Dumbledore's whole Prophecy record scam. Dumbledore tacitly admits to have been reluctant to teach Harry Occlumency himself lest he inadvertently let Tom get a glimpse of his scam.

And I think that Albus was probably on the right track about

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that, too. Because Harry almost always managed to have some sort of a "Tom"-based reaction, whenever he was in the same room as Albus over the whole course of year 5. Even if it was just a spurt of annoyance. Since blooming when had we ever seen Harry getting a knee-jerk reaction of annoyance at Albus? Answer me that. That was *not* typical.

But he sure was getting them over the course of OotP.

So did Tom know about the Occlumency lessons? Had Snape told him?

Snape, rather a lot like Dumbledore, just isn't the sort of person who tells anyone *everything* he knows. (Especially if he did get burnt that way in his 1st year at Hogwarts, as I have speculated elsewhere.) But I really can't see any way in which he *wouldn't* have told Tom that he was going to be stuck trying to teach the Potter brat Occlumency. After all, if Tom was nodding in and out of the kid's head, there was every chance that he was going to find that out anyway. So Snape's involvement in the project had to be accounted for from the outset.

Which reminds us of one of the truisms mentioned in the essay regarding Snape and his spying activities; in any rational universe, Dumbledore had to have been telling Snape what he needed to know in order for him to take steps to protect himself. And he would have known that in order to protect himself, in *this* instance he was going to have to inform Tom, since the chances of Tom finding it out anyway were just way too high to try to sneak the whole project past him.

And, besides, Potter was also part of the bait for this particular trap. We are replaying the whole basic plotline from Year 1, after all.

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So. Tom knew, and Albus knew that Tom knew.

Even if the reader wasn't convinced Snape was a White Hat, to the best of *Dumbledore's* understanding, Snape was his own double agent. He must have mentioned the possibility to Snape that Riddle might choose to make an unscheduled appearance during these sessions. Which I contend was, in fact, the case.

Because, it now appears to me that Dumbledore was absolutely right in his reservations regarding Harry, and eventually Lord Voldemort had indeed come along for the ride. Probably not only once, either, but with some frequency.

After all, Harry tells us later that those lessons made his *scar* hurt. Throughout the whole series, Harry's scar has *only* hurt when Voldemort was involved. (Even though we *were* shown several instances when it *ought* to have hurt, and didn't.)

But, if I am reading the situation correctly, at some point during Year 5 Voldemort must have figured out how to walk through Harry's head without immediately setting the scar off.

Instead, his intrusions tended to set off an attack of CAPS-LOCKS!

(Well, once he sealed off the connection from his end the Capslocks effectively stopped, didn't they?)

But if the connection worked for Voldemort the way it worked for Harry during OotP (and in GoF), Voldemort had no access to Harry's actual *thoughts*. Only to his *feelings*, and to his immediate environment. If it worked for him as it worked for Harry then, he could hear and see what Harry was hearing and seeing. He knew how Harry felt about it, but he didn't know what Harry was actually *thinking*.

Or did he? Voldemort is a whole league better at this kind of

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thing than Harry. And even Harry was able to register Tom's thoughts in DHs (for no properly explained reason, other than authorial fiat — and that it presumably has to have been connected with whatever caused Harry's holly wand to go off on autopilot during the escape from the Dursleys' house).

But, still, I think that at that point, OotP, Tom wasn't able to get into Harry's *mind*. Just his *head*.

Which brings us back to the business with the Pensieve.

We can no longer depend upon the reading that Snape was merely off-loading memories in order to keep them out of Harry's way. He probably didn't give a damn about Harry getting a peek inside his head during a lesson (or think very highly of the possibility that the boy might manage to do so, either). If he was worried about Harry doing that, the memories were safer where they were originally.

At first glance, it is easy to assume that he might have been off-loading memories that he couldn't afford to show to Voldemort. Which, right there, gives us a paradigm shift in our interpretation of just what was really going on during that series of Occlumency lessons.

But the paradigm continues to shift. Because that reading appears to be faulty as well.

We've since had some pretty clear indications that loading a memory into a Pensieve (or a bottle) doesn't remove it from your own head. All that off-loading does is make a copy. Slughorn still had the original memory of that discussion with Riddle after he off-loaded a copy to tamper with. Albus still knew which memory of his own he was showing Harry when he picked up a bottle, from a collection of bottles, and dumped it into the Pensieve. For

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that matter, I'll bet Voldemort remembers perfectly well the day he made a fishing expedition to find out what Dippet was going to do about the death of a student, and then framed Hagrid. Putting the memory into the Diary (which functioned exactly like a Pensieve) didn't eradicate it from his own memory.

Let alone whether or not he still recalls exactly how he murdered his father and grandparents and shared the memory of doing it with his uncle Morfin. It really does appear that the only thing that loading a memory — or more properly, a *copy* of a memory — into a Pensieve, or other vessel does is to make it easier to examine it without one's own emotions getting in the way, or to share it with someone else.

So, right off the top, already we have ample indication that there was something more going on with those lessons than Harry was aware of.



Speaking of which:

Buckle your seat belts because we've got another paradigm shift to plunge through. Or at least a potential one. And it's a major one.

We've known since Book 5 that Tom is a master Legilimens. We've known this about Albus as well. For every bit as long.

Why haven't we ever really applied that knowledge to this situation?

So, just what kind of an effect does the application of our understanding that "Albus Dumbledore is a master Legilimens", have upon the issue of the Occlumency lessons fiasco — which Albus freely *admits* was a fiasco?



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What effect does this awareness have upon our reading of Snape's *directing* of that fiasco. We get a distinct impression at the end of the year that Snape seems to have let Albus down to some degree. But we don't get the feeling that Albus was particularly put out over it. Somewhat regretful, yes. But not deeply disappointed nor seriously upset. And he was certainly not anything like angry.

Could this have anything to do with the Pensieve gambit?

For that matter, is off-loading memories into a Pensieve even necessary in order to teach a kid Occlumency? We certainly never saw them *use* that Pensieve in the course of the lessons. It isn't an obvious component to the process.

So what was the Pensieve even doing there?

Albus knew that Harry was aware of what a Pensieve is for. He'd fished the kid out of that Pensieve in his office himself the previous year. He allowed Snape to borrow the Pensieve. He seems to have raised no objections to Snape's having done so (Q: was that at his suggestion?). But what purpose would Snape have had in asking to borrow it? Albus would hardly have supposed that Snape was going to make a presentation on getting memories into and out of a Pensieve if the point is to keep someone else from getting memories out of your head. We're missing a connection here.

And the following year, after the shouting is over, and the crisis about Tom messing with Harry's head seems to be past, Albus informs Harry that he "rather expected" that Tom would have closed the connection off; yet even though they now seem to have a breathing space in which to do it, he doesn't reschedule the Occlumency lessons, doesn't even *try* to teach the kid



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how to keep someone out of his head. Can he be so sure that Tom will never again feel he has a reason to ever want to read Harry? That doesn't sound like a particularly safe assumption to me. In fact it turned out not to be safe at all. Nor even accurate.

So. Again. Why was the Pensieve there at all? Why were the memories there? Why was *that* memory there?

Do the memories in the Pensieve even matter?

Sure, it *looks* like they do. But do they, *really*?

They certainly matter to the plot. I am far less than convinced that they mattered to the lessons. Snape never even used the memories in the lessons.

Particularly when you reflect that the incident which we watched in our Pensieve junket has got to have provided at least a part of the centerpiece of the "official reason" why Snape may have signed up with Riddle in the first place. (He doesn't even seem to have revealed the werewolf caper to Tom, which would have made a far more valuable bit of information for someone who is supposedly "against" Albus Dumbledore.) Even if Snape had never directly told Tom of the incident we saw in the our Pensieve junket, that episode took place in public. At least two of the 2nd-generation DEs were still at school when it happened. The incident was certainly known. Frankly, given the backtrail of Snape's dealings with Albus, using the Pensieve junket as an 'official reason' to sign up with the DEs in retaliation begins to look about as convincing as the tale of remorse and forgiveness which serves as the "official reason" for his having recanted from them.

— Providing yet another reason why he may have stocked the Pensieve with that memory. No one could be sure of just

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how much access Tom had to Harry's conscious thoughts, after all. Once the boy went blundering into that memory — which Voldemort was already aware of — could Voldemort possibly *blame* Snape for throwing the kid out of his office and ending the lessons?

Hold that thought.



From Albus's end, I ended up suspecting the Occlumency lessons were a charade from the beginning. Sure, he probably hoped that the boy *might* be able to pick up something from them. But, more to the point, it kept Harry distracted from the fact that he was being deliberately kept in the dark by giving him a justification for *why* he is being kept in the dark, and dangling a carrot in front of his nose as to what he has to do if he wants to be let in on the secrets.

A carrot which everyone involved in the project, apart from Harry, seems to have known is never going to be within his grasp.

I repeat: Albus Dumbledore was an accomplished Legilimens.

Rowling tells us in one of her post-HBP interviews (not that we can necessarily trust anything Rowling *ever* tells us in an interview) that Draco Malfoy's ability to compartmentalize his thoughts and feelings is one of the reasons he was able to so effectively learn Occlumency. Albus can see at a glance that Harry's mind is a disorganized jumble with everything bleeding into everything else. And that isn't going to change any time soon. Harry's inability to emotionally compartmentalize is going to ensure that he will probably never make a sufficiently effective Occlumens to be able to trust him with sensitive infor-

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mation. The lessons simply aren't going to succeed. They have a far better chance of getting Tom to close off the connection from his end.

Hold that thought, too.

Belatedly one really has to wonder whether Harry's obvious inability to block off the connection wasn't being dangled in front of Tom as bait for another trap. And Tom fell right into it.

I will admit that this reading requires a willingness to read Albus as a lot more calculating than one really prefers — although it is *perfectly* in keeping with DHs!Albus — but if Dumbledore was stuck with the fact that Tom was almost certainly messing with the kid's head *anyway*...

It's possible that the Occlumency lesson gambit may have been Plan B.



Because the fact remains that Albus — or somebody — had called off the Order's guards by the time Harry was goaded into making his raid on the DoM. Harry only had to deal with spinning doors and DEs. He didn't have to bypass somebody in Moody's invisibility cloak standing guard as well.

Unless somebody in Moody's invisibility cloak was standing by, and sent a Patronus off to Albus as soon as the kids were through one of the doors and no longer in a position to see it.

Ought we to be paying a bit more attention to the fact that it was only after the Order nearly lost Arthur Weasley to his stint of guard duty, that Harry was abruptly informed that he was going to be having Occlumency lessons with Snape? Had Albus decided that the potential risk was too high, or had a

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new possibility for working the situation occurred to him when Harry came to report the snake attack? Particularly since he *must* have seen that shadow of Tom in Harry's eyes when he was given Harry's story in his office before sending Harry and the Weasleys to #12. Even Harry was aware of Tom wanting to bite Albus during that sequence.

That would have certainly been a reasonable time for Albus to have come up with a Plan B. The Occlumency lessons were proposed barely a scant couple of weeks after that snake attack. Before the end of the term break; before Arthur was even released from St Mungo's.

Had the snake attack just revealed a leak that needed to be plugged and this was an attempt to do so, as it appeared? Or did Albus come up with an alternate plan to use the current situation, as it stood, against Tom?

And yet, if he and Snape were pretty sure that they weren't going to be *able* to teach Harry how to keep Voldemort out of his head, why force the boy to take Occlumency lessons at all?

Might it be, perhaps, that once it was clear that the connection between Tom and Harry was known to both parties, Albus decided that posting guards in the DoM was no longer likely to flush Voldemort out of hiding, because Tom would be more likely to try to get at the Prophecy through Harry?

Or was Albus privy to some *other* bit of relevant information via Snape?

The big Azkaban breakout took place the day the kids all piled onto the Knight Bus and the Hogwarts Express and rode back to school at the end of the Christmas holidays. Had Snape been able to give Albus a heads-up to expect it?



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After all, once Rookwood was out of Azkaban and able to bring Tom up to speed on what security measures the Ministry actually uses on Prophecy records, Albus's "guarded door" bluff was due to be called.



Before going any farther down this rabbit hole, let's look in on the party of the third part.

Just what was Tom Riddle up to over the course of year 5?

Tom, after all, had an agenda in Year 5 (well, to be frank, Tom has always had an agenda)

He needed to get up to speed on just what resources he had available to work with. Where were his remaining followers placed, what were their assets, what was the most effective way to deploy them?

He needed to retrieve the surviving faithful from Azkaban and re-establish or renegotiate his contacts with Greyback's band and the Giants.

He *particularly* wanted to examine that Prophecy record to see if the full record would make it clear what had gone wrong at Godric's Hollow.

Before he knew about the specific protections the Ministry places on Prophecy records Tom was sending redshirts in to retrieve it. We don't know whether he lost any of his own to the magically induced dementia triggered by the Ministry's spells before they started Imperiusing others to fetch it in their place (Sturgis Podmore, Bode) but I suspect he may have. We do not know who they were though. This was the situation, as it stood, all through the summer and the Autumn term at



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Hogwarts.

In December he finally possessed Nagini and went after it himself*.

*Or something of that nature. If he was able to possess the snake without ill effects, it suggests that the failure of his attempt to possess Harry at the end of the year was either due Lily's remaining protection on her son, or to some damage sustained at Godric's Hollow by the fragment itself.

On the face of it, it seems completely brain-dead to send a dirty great snake into the Ministry rather than to take Polyjuice and go in himself, but it probably would have worked, if Arthur Weasley hadn't got in the way.

After the snake gambit — with Tom's emotions running high enough to drag Harry along too, there was a pause. Tom turned his attentions to the Azkaban breakout for about three weeks, since that was imminent, and after that, he had access to Rookwood and his information about how the DoM operated. Once he had that, he stopped trying to send anyone after the record in the Ministry. By the summer term, Albus appears to have called off the round-the-clock guards on the DoM as well.

Instead, I think Tom spent the Spring term priming Dolores, at long distance through Lucius and Fudge, to send him Trelawney herself.

And, in the meantime, he started actively exploring the possibilities of the Harry connection. He had just managed to confirm that, yes, the connection would enable a deliberate sending, as well as unconscious random connections by the end of the term, when Dolores officially sacked Trelawney and attempted to get her thrown from the castle where she would



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be without protection.

Dumbledore nipped in and foiled the attempt to capture Trelawney, but he was driven out of the school himself by the following week, and unable to continue to monitor further developments on the Harry connection. And also unable to provide a clear and present reason for Snape to be forced to continue the lessons.



The Pensieve had been a presence in those lessons from the beginning, even if it was never used in the lessons. So what did Albus and Snape mean by it? What did they mean by the lessons at all?

Well, let's take a look at this problem through our standard filter of; "what happened was what was *meant* to happen."

There really do seem to be remarkably few coincidences over the course of this series (regardless of what Rowling keeps trying to imply).

So, okay, what *did* actually happen during all those Occlumency lessons?

Snape repeatedly broke into Harry's memories and sifted through them.

Looking for something?

I think he just may have been.

Snape was covertly monitoring the situation.

He was repeatedly breaking into Harry's memories looking for signs of Voldemort's *tampering*.

You *bet* it was "his job" to find out what the Dark Lord was up to!

They knew that Tom was aware of the connection. They



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suspected he was using Harry as an observation post, and they hadn't any real hope of being able to stop him. But I think it is a safe bet that they would have wanted to determine whether Tom was using that connection for anything *else*.

Weeks before Albus was "driven" from the school, Snape would have already reported that Potter was getting visions of the hall of doors, possibly a few other random glimpses. Albus let that much slip at the debriefing session at the end of the year by admitting that he knew about those. But I don't think they were able to determine whether those were actual *sendings*, or just leaks.

I think it is probable that Albus and Snape had concluded that sooner or later Tom *would* make an attempt to lure Harry into the DoM. After all, they knew about the protections that the Ministry puts on Prophecy records. Once Rookwood, who had worked in the Department had been broken out of Azkaban, (at the end the Christmas break) they knew that Voldemort would soon know it too. Either Tom would have to go himself, or he would have to lure Harry into doing it. And given Tom's reluctance to do his own dirty work the probable direction of his future plans was all but inevitable. Particularly when such a lure might also facilitate *capturing* Potter.

Albus no doubt thought that between himself, Minerva, Hagrid, and Snape they would be able to keep Harry at Hogwarts when the lure was deployed, or that he would be in a position to accompany Harry when the balloon went up, and get Voldemort's return publicly exposed — as he had been attempting to do all year.

No one anticipated that by the time it happened not only he, but both Hagrid *and* Minerva would ALL be removed from the



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school, leaving Snape, over-extended, to man the fort on his own, without blowing his cover with Tom.

And it wasn't until the Rookwood "vision" surfaced which served as their first unequivocal indication that Voldemort was deliberately sending up a trial balloon.

Their hypothesis had finally been confirmed.

Now they had to make preparations for the lure. Whenever that would come. They had no idea *when* it would come. Only that it *would*.



Which brings us back to the blooming Pensieve.

What the hell was going on with that?

I still doubt that Snape gives a damn over Voldemort finding out how James Potter bullied him while they were both at Hogwarts, either. Tom already knows about that. He's probably taunted Snape about it, too. Tom does that kind of thing. For Tom, that memory was just there as a bonus.

Or as a plant. We have no way of knowing whether the three memories that Snape made such a point of off-loading before each session were always the same three memories.

With Tom potentially watching over his shoulder, Snape frankly couldn't afford to succeed in that particular venture's official purpose of teaching the kid to shut him out, even if they had considered it doable. And with Tom and his demands in the equation, Snape and Albus must have always known that they might need an exit strategy. I think the Pensieve memories constituted that exit strategy.

And from the outside, it looks very much as if Snape decided

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that the best way to sidestep the whole issue was to provoke Harry into behavior that would give him an excuse to throw the boy out of the office and refuse to teach him further. At that point in the story, regardless of who you thought Snape was really working for, his primary concern would be to cover his own arse with both his "Masters."

But, now... what I really suspect he was doing was putting on a show for Tom.

Think about it. Snape's behavior throughout the whole Occlumency fiasco was as fishy as a dockside quay. He could have removed those memories before Harry showed up for the lesson. He could have put the Pensieve in a cupboard, or kept it in his private quarters. Instead, he certainly knows that Harry is aware of what a Pensieve is (if I am on the right track here, Albus would have brought him up to speed on that), he definitely knows that the kid can be as curious as a cat, and yet the first thing he does at every lesson is to put on a great show of sticking private thoughts into the Pensieve as soon as the boy shows up. Just what are we supposed to think of such behavior?

For that matter what was *Voldemort* supposed to think of that behavior? We can count upon his having been informed of the project. *He* knows what a Pensieve is, too. AND how they work. Hell, he duplicated the function of one in that Diary when he was Harry's age. He also knew that putting memories into a Pensieve doesn't erase them from your *head*.

Snape knows that too. So does Albus.

Ah, but did *Harry*?

We're supposed to have overlooked that detail aren't we? I'll bet Harry (who, in a lot of ways, is written as a dolt) didn't real-

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ize it yet. So now we're all supposed to assume that the whole point of that performance was in case Tom decided to wander in, right? Well, maybe that *is the point*. Maybe the whole show was for Voldemort's benefit.

And just maybe Tom might have had a more *active* part in the proceedings, too.

He may have even written the script.

After all, what would *Tom* have thought of Albus's directive that Snape was suddenly supposed to teach Potter Occlumency?

He couldn't have wanted him to succeed.

In fact, he would have wanted Snape to find some pretext to throw the kid out, wouldn't he?

And once Albus had been driven from the school, which Tom would have certainly learned quickly enough either from Snape directly or through the Umbridge->Fudge->Malfoy grapevine, Snape wouldn't have had much of an excuse not to.

I do now think that Snape may have been ordered to end those lessons. He'd have passed word to Albus about it, but he had no choice but to comply (which might explain Albus's lack of anger at Snape over having put a stop to it). That might also make sense of the only hiccup in the whole planned "exit strategy" hypothesis, in which Albus's last statement to Harry was an exhortation to concentrate on the Occlumency lessons.

Instead, Tom spent the Summer term concentrating on Harry.



At the beginning of the enterprise Snape couldn't have anticipated just how *very* poor Harry's performance would be. Or

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could be led to be. We were given a strong impression that Harry's performance steadily degraded throughout the entire Spring term. And as long as Harry was making such a miserable show of the proceedings, Snape hadn't any real reason to push the issue in the face of Dumbledore's supposed orders. In fact, he may have even gotten a mean satisfaction at having the boy at his mercy and was perfectly willing to string the situation out as long as necessary. Particularly with Tom looking on. He could then smugly, and truthfully, inform both his masters that the boy "wasn't trying." But once Harry turned the tables on him towards the end of March, the edge that Snape was walking became just too precarious.

And way too suspicious, also. What the hell was going on *there*?

If you reread the relevant sequence of Harry's penultimate Occlumency lesson, in the chapter 'Seen and Unforeseen', you will notice that it was only in *that* particular session — in which Snape had finally uncovered the Rookwood vision — that Harry, after yet another failed attempt to block Snape's intrusion into his mind, picked himself up off the floor, and after listening to Snape's taunting harangue about it not being Harry's job to find out what the Dark Lord was doing, Harry suddenly, out of the blue, challenged Snape about being Dumbledore's spy. Which Snape admitted, with a smirk.

Immediately afterwards, when the session resumed, Harry's perception was suddenly that, yes, he could see the Dementors converging on him from his own memory — but that he could still see Snape standing in front of him muttering under his breath. Gradually the Dementors faded out, Snape came back into focus, and only **then** did Harry raise his wand and cast the Protego

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shielding charm, which drove through Snape's Occlumency shield and some way into Snape's own early memories.

Now, Snape's Occlumency shield may have had to be lowered somewhat in order for him to attack Harry's mind. That may be why Dumbledore wasn't going to get involved in the lessons himself. And, given that he'd now found the evidence of tampering that he was looking for, Snape may have deliberately drawn Potter in in order to raise his curiosity, in order to tempt him into taking the bait for the exit strategy.

But my point here is that Harry clearly didn't consciously *do* anything to bring this result about.

From where *he* was standing, it just *happened*. Ergo; it is not beyond the realm of possibility that either Snape's retreat was deliberate, or that someone *other* than Harry was pushing back Snape's attempt to invade his thoughts. If it wasn't Snape's doing, and it wasn't Harry's, and Harry's wand wasn't doing it on autopilot, who does that leave?

I don't think Tom would have deliberately revealed the Rookwood "vision" to Snape. I doubt that he would have been overjoyed when it was uncovered, either.

And, suggestively enough, as soon as Snape throws Harry out of his own head, he, white-faced, goes and fiddles with the Pensieve as if to be sure the memories he stored in it were still there. i.e., *Drawing attention* to them.

It might also be significant that when Snape recovered his composure and they resumed the session Harry's mind went immediately to the hall of doors. And for the first time, one of the doors opened.

If it weren't for that Protego charm, I'd be convinced that

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maybe this sequence *WAS* all Snape's doing. That maybe this whole sequence was Snape's first attempt at the gambit to throw Harry out of his office and end the lessons. Now that he'd found the Rookwood vision, Snape could inform Albus that he was correct in his suspicion as to what the Dark Lord was "up to."

There is every reason to suspect that, with Lucius Malfoy's commendation behind him, Snape had been at least to some degree in Umbridge's confidence that year, (the Inquisitorial Squad was composed entirely of students from his own House, after all) and that he may have known that it was Umbridge's intention to sack Trelawney that very evening, and that this would raise enough of an uproar to give him an excuse to leave Potter alone in the room with the Pensieve, and a set of hand-picked memories, especially selected just for him.

The ploy of pulling Potter into his *own* memories — memories which not at all coincidentally cast himself very much in the same role that Harry had played among the Dursleys — more knowledge with which Snape was entirely familiar by that time — would have made for a very good lead-in to a trip into that Pensieve and a particularly... *enlightening* evening for young Potter.

But that Protego charm was not Snape's doing. I find I can't think of any definite indication of what prompted it.



For that matter, until HBP came out, it looked as if there was another potential booby trap involved in this little exercise, and Snape may have been aware of that one as well. From what we've seen in both GoF and OotP, while Harry clearly knows what a

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Pensieve is, he didn't seem to know how to use one properly.

To that point in the series, it had appeared to me that when a Pensieve is used the way it is intended to be used, or, at least as Dumbledore had always been seen to use it, one places the selected memories into the Pensieve and stirs them with one's wand and the memory rises up out of the Pensieve and replays itself *exactly as it played out* in real life.

When one uses a Pensieve improperly, as Harry had always used it, someone puts their memories into the Pensieve, you shove your face into the bowl like a dog, and mentally wander off into someone else's experience — which clearly contains more than just their own vantage point. In fact it seems to record everything within a specific (and as yet unstated) radius around that person — until the owner of the Pensieve comes along and hauls you out of it.

Leading me to suspect that someday Harry was going to wander off into a Pensieve and not be able to find his way back.

Well, it now seems that this interpretation was distinctly off. Both techniques are valid usages. But the first version enables the user to chose what part of the memory is on view, and to exert far greater control over what information is actually conveyed, thereby concealing part of the truth. Which, in retrospect, is only what we might expect from Albus



But, returning to that penultimate Occlumency session, we were handed yet another piece of screwiness. While Harry undoubtedly knew at least one Shield charm which causes a rebound of an attacking spell upon the attacker — for he taught

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it to the DA — we didn't know going into this sequence that the one Harry knew was in fact the *Protego* charm. And it was suddenly very unlike Rowling's earlier methods of exposition to spring the use of a new spell on us in the course of the story unless that piece of magic had been previously introduced *by name*: Sometimes anything up to a couple of books earlier.

I guess we ought to have taken this as a warning that Rowling was changing the rules on us and throwing the established concept of "fair play" out the window. But at the time it seemed like it could be a bit of possibly relevant screwiness. (From this end of the series, this lapse now just looks like yet another cumulative indication of burnout.)

For Harry to — without even consciously making a choice in the matter — suddenly raise his wand and cast *Protego*, especially when he had done nothing but stand there, like a lump, until the memory of the Dementors had already faded out, and Snape's Legilimency attack had allegedly been successfully resisted; to cast *Protego*, and then — and only after the fact, and by default — to have Snape identify *Protego* as the reflecting Shield charm, is all of a piece with the extra-thick layer of murkiness and confusion with which Rowling has shrouded the whole issue of those Occlumency Lessons. Or, indeed, the whole back half of the series.

Particularly since there is no apparent reason for her not to have already given us the name of the spell back when Harry was actively teaching it to the DA. That made me very uneasy. It's almost as if Rowling intended for us to be suspicious of this suddenly unfamiliar piece of magic despite the "reasonable explanation" she waves under our noses immediately afterwards.

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Or as a warning that, as we have found is typical in this series, she intended to pull this particular unfair trick on the reader again. (Boy howdy.)

I also suspect that Ron may have also been at least partially right; Snape was *not* helping Harry to improve at this skill, even if Harry's own slacking off was what was primarily at fault. Even if Harry really does lack the underlying makings of an Occlumens. Albus confirms Ron's suspicions when he admits that the lessons were likely to open Harry's mind further — which is why he hadn't attempted to teach Harry himself.

By this time I just have to wonder whether this wasn't simply an admission that Snape was deliberately subverting Harry and leaving him open to Tom's tampering. With Albus's knowledge and approval, too. And if you go with one of the Evil!Albus readings, possibly even at his direction.

If Albus's Plan B depended upon Tom attempting to lure Harry into the DoM to retrieve the Prophecy record for him — and possibly for Albus to *accompany* him when he did it — then it definitely appears to have been working.



As it turned out, Harry *didn't* look into the Pensieve the first time it was offered. Trelawney's uproar over being sacked, called Snape out of the room right on schedule, leaving Harry alone with the Pensieve. (Exactly at the point that it had been borne in on Snape that his escape clause might need to be executed.) But Harry followed Snape out of the room to see what the ruckus was, instead of taking the bait.

Something else that I suspect might be significant is that this

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particular breakthrough appears to have taken place at the very end of March, about two weeks after Harry had his vision of the interview between Voldemort and Rookwood. And the timing of all of these events now seems rather suspicious to me.

The three Hogwarts terms run; Autumn Term = September to mid-December; Spring Term = roughly January-March; Summer Term = roughly April-June, with respectively a 3 week and a 2 week break between them. This second break apparently shifts slightly one way or the other, year by year, possibly in order to contain Easter. Or it might simply be called the Easter break and its timing based on some other criterion.

Note: Rowling plays fast and loose with these term divisions whenever she chooses. But it seems significant that her narrative of the time between the penultimate Occlumency session and the final one, manages to seriously muddle our realization that the actual time involved could not have been more than a week. She buries us in day-to-day minutia which gives the impression that rather a lot of time had passed, but the only definite statement as to time passing between the penultimate session and the final one (which *ought* to have been no more than a week apart) is that we went from March to April. (Easter must have been late that year.) During this interval the DA was routed and Dumbledore was driven from the school. Which could have been only a day or two after Trelawney was sacked.

And the very first Occlumency session after Dumbledore is gone, which was still before the term broke up for Easter, Snape deliberately left Harry alone with the Pensieve, before they could even get properly started. And, from the way Rowling gives us the lead-in to this final session, it sounds very much

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as if this probably is the *very next session* after the one where Harry “broke through” Snape’s guard.

Although I still cannot be altogether certain about the possible offer of the gambit during the previous session, I am convinced that this second “opportunity,” the one that did succeed, absolutely was set up deliberately. We tend to overlook just how quickly that second opportunity followed upon the first.



Harry and Snape (and the rest of Hogwarts) were all having a very busy time that Spring. In the middle of February Harry had given Rita Skeeter an exclusive interview about the return of the Dark Lord. The article had been printed in the March edition of the QUIBBLER. Harry had his vision of Voldemort and Rookwood right after the article was published and copies reached the school, and the vision was already two weeks past when he appeared to finally turn the tables on Snape during an Occlumency lesson. This session took place on the evening that Trelawney was sacked.

Query: doesn’t it strike anyone but me as decidedly sinister that within two weeks after we see Rookwood explaining the protections that the Ministry routinely places on Prophecy records, Trelawney is abruptly sacked, a scant week–10 days before the end of the school Term (why not just wait until the Term ends at least?) and a determined effort is made to see her ejected from the protections of Hogwarts Castle?

On the other hand, do we have any reason to believe that the Rookwood “vision” took place in real time? In that vision, we watched Rookwood explain why Bode (strangled by the cutting

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of Devil’s Snare in St Mungo’s over the Christmas break) could NOT have removed the Prophecy record from the DoM.

Rookwood had been sprung from Azkaban back in, what? The first week of January? The news of the break-out was all over the front page of the Prophet on the kids’ first day back at school. Wouldn’t you expect this particular conversation to have taken place back around *then*?

And what’s with the bit at the end of the vision where after Rookwood leaves the room, and once there no longer is anything in the room to associate it with any specific time, then Voldemort suddenly gets up, goes over and reveals himself in the mirror, so Harry cannot help but get the point of what he has been watching? Does the former Tom Riddle really strike you as the kind of guy who spends a lot of time contemplating himself in mirrors? He’s not exactly introspective, is he?

But he does have a very long track record of experimenting with *memory manipulation*.

Think about it.



Let’s take a broader look at what was going on the evening Harry had that vision.

The QUIBBLER article had just come out, and Umbridge with her usual ineptitude managed to assure that everyone in the school would read it, by declaring it contraband. There is much celebration in the Gryffindor common room.

And Harry’s *scar* starts prickling. He ends up going to bed early and falling asleep with what is now beginning to look like suspicious ease.

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Immediately he is in the room with Rookwood, observing the proceedings from Voldemort's eyes. And, at the end of it, Tom identifies himself.

Harry wakes with a shriek, his scar burning, and relates the "dream" to Ron who has come upstairs and is getting ready for bed.

Ron turns in, and Harry lies awake for some time longer, his scar still prickling. Harry is sure that this is backwash of the DE Avery being punished for giving his Master bad information, as had been mentioned in passing in the vision.

Well, I'm no longer so sure of that.

Even if Voldemort only did become suddenly aware of the connection just before Christmas — of which I am not altogether convinced, it might have been earlier — he will probably have been forming plans to use it ever since. And it is clear that at the end of the year he *did* use it — by sending an entirely false vision to Harry through it.

I think the Rookwood "dream" was a test run.

Tom had already figured out that he could eavesdrop on the kid, which wasn't at all profitable. The kid didn't know anything of use. He had also figured how to do it without the kid being aware of him. At least some of the time. He probably looked in on the Occlumency sessions and saw nothing in Snape's behavior to rouse his suspicions. In fact, from his vantage point he sees Snape continually ripping through the boy's mind and taking a great degree of satisfaction from it.

He's lately taken to pushing the vision of the hall of doors at the kid whenever the kid drops off to sleep. By March he may have felt it was time to see whether he could actually send the kid a coherent memory. One of his own. Something to clue the kid in that

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there was something *important* involved, a *mystery* for him to solve. In the *Department* of Mysteries. One that only *he* can handle.

Lucius tells us later that Tom wasn't aware that Harry still didn't know about the Prophecy. Tom thought he was giving the kid a much juicier clue than he actually had.

And then he follows the dream immediately afterwards and hangs around to listen in on what the kid has to say about it, to find out whether the process works.



In the week or thereabouts following Umbridge's attempt to sack Trelawney, we go from March to April, Marrietta Edgecombe rats out the DA's last meeting *of the term* and Dumbledore, who had managed to keep Trelawney from being thrown out of the castle a couple of days earlier is driven out himself by Cornelius Fudge and his staff. Umbridge is declared Headmistress. Montague disappears. Madam Umbridge tries to question Harry under Veritiserum, there is another major Weasley Twins disruption, this one with fireworks, and at the very next Occlumency session, the *last of the term*, Montague suddenly and conspicuously makes his reappearance and Snape is called out of the room leaving Harry alone with the Pensieve.

Like I say, I cannot see *any* way that Montague's return could have been orchestrated deliberately. By *anyone*.

Draco — and Umbridge — clearly didn't know what was going on regarding Harry and Snape's sessions. Not even the cover story that Snape was teaching the boy "remedial Potions," let alone Occlumency.

(One really has to wonder what Malfoy thought of Potter's

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abrupt elevation to being an alleged potions genius the following year. Continuity? What's that?)

I very much doubt that it is beyond Snape's ingenuity to have set up a situation where he could depend upon *something* calling him out of the room and leaving Potter alone with that Pensieve. But it is impossible, given the information at our disposal to imagine any scenario wherein Snape could have arranged for that sudden, oh-so-opportune reappearance of Montague. It's plausible that he already had the matter covered by some other design, and Montague's fortuitous reappearance scuttled the need to invoke his original arrangement. But I certainly do not know what that design might have been, and I certainly cannot prove it existed.



And while we are on the subject:

I am forced to have to concede that in both Book 5 and Book 6 there is a point that you just have to throw up your hands and allow for there being a crucial, but totally random element playing hob with the equation.

In HBP it seems to have been Trelawney blundering into the Room of Requirement and being ejected just in time for Harry to stumble across her and be given her account of the night of the Prophecy. There just isn't any plausible way for anyone to have orchestrated that. It appears to have been pure sod's law. But the incident was *absolutely critical* to getting a key piece of the Snape backstory information across to both Harry and to the reader.

In OotP the determinedly random element is Montague's

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reappearance at exactly the right time for Harry to have been left alone with the means of discovering yet another key piece of information about Snape's past. I cannot see any plausible way in which that can have been planned for by *anybody* involved in the matter, either. But, I still contend that some alternative distraction probably had been.

Look at it. The timing of Harry being left alone with the Pensieve is just too suspicious for it to have been a coincidence. I mean, really! The *very next session* after Dumbledore was driven out of the school, Harry just "happens" to be left alone in a room with a Pensieve holding Snape's private memories, and no other distractions? I ask you!

For that matter, if this is a set-up, we can't be altogether sure that the memories the Pensieve was stocked with that evening were even the *same* ones that Snape usually made such a show of extracting. Although they were probably all fairly similarly in content.

With this in mind, what I suspect is that the memories selected for removal that particular evening (and, I agree, it is quite possible for all of those evenings, but I seriously doubt that Snape gives a good goddamn whether Voldemort knows how Potter and Black picked on him when they were all still at school, and there is nothing in that memory to reveal or confirm *any* previous connection to Lily) were the very memories that would be the most shocking and painful to Harry. What's more, I would wager that all three of the memories extracted that evening were hand-picked to show James Potter and Sirius Black in the very *worst* possible light.

And another inference, assuming that the above is an accu-

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rate reading, is that however much genuine feeling may have underlain it — also assuming that Professor Snape possessed any sort of genuine feelings — his towering fury at finding Harry messing about in the Pensieve must have been at least partially a performance. This was not a ludicrous and out-of-control tantrum on the order of the one he threw at the end of PoA. The very fact that the one object actually thrown at the boy was a jar of dried cockroaches — possibly the very easiest thing in his entire stores to replace — certainly does not offer much in the way of a contradiction of this reading.

As to the presence of Lord Voldemort in Harry's head over the course of OotP: I think that Voldemort was along for the ride far more often than the reader realizes on an initial trip through the book. Lord Voldemort's emotions are seriously out of whack for the most part, but we know that if there is one emotion which fuels just about all of Voldemort's actions, that emotion is rage. We have hardly ever seen him when he was not angry. Frustrated anger over the puzzle of the Mirror of Erisid, sullen anger at his own helplessness and being at Wormtail's mercy, vindictive anger at his followers who had deliberately let him down, or the controlled fury of finding his mission bollixed up by their incompetence in the raid on the DoM. Apart from that one single burst of exhilaration when he and his followers managed to break out the Azkaban inmates, at this point in the series various shades of anger were about the only emotion he had that still functioned.

Which suggested to me that much, if not most of the CAPS-LOCK!Harry tedium that we were treated to over the course of OotP was a side effect of his having an angry Dark Lord

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waltzing in and out of his head and jerking him around. There are far too many points in the story where we are told of some surge of anger that “came out of nowhere.”

Only, Harry, rather than trying to determine whether the anger he was feeling was actually *his*, would immediately cast around for a reason for *why* he was suddenly angry.

Well, hey, a 15-year-old who is being deliberately kept in the dark about matters that concern *him*, and moreover is being deliberately provoked by the likes of Dolores Umbridge will find no shortage of reasons to be angry. But it was only when the emotion came as a long-distance transmission, and Voldemort himself was not actually present in his head that Harry was able to determine that the feeling was not his own.

And Voldemort, who was probably aware of the effect he was having no doubt took some satisfaction in jerking Potter's chain. Get the kid mad enough and maybe he'll do something stupid.

And one wonders just how much of this Snape was aware of, and how an awareness of this issue contributed to Snape's treatment of Harry over the same period.

Rowling has to a large degree confirmed my suspicion about the cause of Harry's CAPSLOCKS syndrome. Although since she said it in an interview, I won't be surprised if she changes or reverses the statement whenever she feels like it.



So just what was the timing on the wrap-up of the Occlumency sequence?

First; Albus was forced to beat a strategic retreat. I don't

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think that he originally intended to leave the school to Umbridge. But I also don't think he gave much for her chances of being able to do the place any lasting harm, either. Once Voldemort's return was publicly acknowledged, her house of cards would come tumbling down around her ears, and he would rather leave the school in her hands until then than let a couple of dozen of his students be expelled (which unlike her "lifetime bans" on playing Quidditch would *not* have been reversible) over this DA business.

Before he leaves, he exhorts Harry to pay attention to what Snape tells him and to practice it. To try to close his mind to Voldemort. He does not appear to know, or to admit, that the lessons have already served their purpose. But, once again, this is Albus. He must have hoped the kid would at least *try*.

And Harry *should* have kept practicing, even if Snape wasn't still giving him lessons.

Next; Snape discontinues the Occlumency lessons.

Leaving the way clear for Voldemort to send his lure without interference.

And then everyone settled in to watch Harry like a flock of hawks, and wait.

And wait.

And *wait*.

It belatedly occurred to me that this was yet *another* Book 5 = Book 1 moment.

Waiting for Voldemort to send out his lure to Harry must have been every bit as nerve-wracking as waiting for Quirrell-Mort to storm the Labyrinth after Hagrid had passed him the final piece of information of how to get past Fluffy all the way

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back at Christmas.

No one anticipated that Hagrid would be forcibly driven from the school by Aurors and that Minerva would get caught in the cross-fire and end up in St Mungo's.

Leaving only Snape to hold down the fort under Umbridge's watch.

And between Hermione, Umbridge, and Grawp, Harry managed to give Snape the slip.

The *very next day*.

One seriously has to wonder how much coordination was going on from the Ministry end through Lucius and Umbridge that Snape had little access to.

And lurking off at the other end of the whole Occlumency sequence, we have Albus's peculiar statement early in HBP that he "rather expected" that by that time Tom would have closed off the connection between himself and Harry.

Albus explained it that Tom would have belatedly realized the danger of allowing Harry such access to his own mind.

For no reason that we could determine — given the evidence that had surfaced by that point in the series. Having access to Tom's mind was an issue which only later became relevant two books *after* OotP.

Having lost nearly a quarter of his followers in the botched raid on the DoM, I should imagine Tom might decide the link to Harry wasn't worth maintaining. But, I suspect the *real* reason for his closing the connection off, was that Tom had finally got what he wanted from it and saw no further use for it.

After all, in the final wrap-up, Albus finally showed Harry Trelawney giving her Prophecy. WHILE Harry's mind was still

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wide open to Tom. I really am convinced that Tom was along for the ride in that debriefing.

And Tom has always underestimated Harry. For that matter, a year-long trip through the tunnel of adolescent angst would have given him every reason to *continue* to underestimate Harry. He probably cannot imagine any circumstances under which he would ever again *need* to read Harry.



Which brings me to John Granger and “Tom Riddle’s Scar-O-Vision.”

This was one of John’s theories which was largely designed to serve as a jumping-off spot rather than necessarily to be taken seriously. I stumbled over it from a somewhat oblique approach. There was a meet-up of some Potter fans here in L.A. in January of 2007 and one of the people there had come up with what was largely a duplicate of Professor_Mum’s theory that the Albus who took Harry to the Sea Cave was a polyjuiced substitute.

As I believe I’ve said elsewhere, I don’t actually think too highly of that particular theory, although I do agree that Albus’s behavior was noticeably peculiar that evening.

The salient point is that the default leader of the group read a number of the passages regarding the adventure of the Dark Lord’s Sea Cave aloud and having already read John’s post referring to his Scar-O-Vision theory, something clicked. I can’t honestly say that I had altogether overlooked the issue before that, but I’d noted and dismissed it. The material sounded a bit more significant read aloud.

I’m still not altogether convinced, and Rowling has shot the central theme of it down, but I do agree there does appear to be a viable alternate reading from the standard one lurking about.



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So. Concerning Tom Riddle’s Scar-O-Vision:

Once again from the top: Albus asks Harry at the first opportunity in Year 6 whether he has had any more trouble with his scar, and Harry tells him no, admitting that he had expected it to be giving him more trouble and it wasn’t. Albus rather surprisingly responds with the statement that he had expected otherwise, that after his experience in the Atrium, Tom would have closed of the connection from the other end.

Why do we just assume that that is the end of the matter? (Well, *Harry* seems to, that’s probably the reason we do.)

Is the assumption justified?

I’m not at all sure it is. (Turns out it wasn’t, either. Although it certainly didn’t work out as one might have expected it to.)

Just because someone has an Occlumency shield up and nothing is getting through, I’m not sure we can say that they aren’t aware that there are things out there *trying* to get through. The connection still exists.

Over year 6 Harry has the usual adolescent angst to juggle, but Tom who may have been vaguely aware of it in the background, doesn’t give squat for adolescent angst. He takes no interest in Quidditch, even less in chest monsters, and while Harry was intermittently jealous, or annoyed, or embarrassed, and in the Sectumsempra incident horrified and frightened, there really wasn’t much *sustained* emotion going on that year from Harry’s end to catch Tom’s interest. Harry was having an uncharacteristically “normal” year. For Harry.

Until the night that Albus hauled him off to the sea cave.

Harry got a major shock from Sybill. And at that point he suddenly went into the kind of sustained rage that we hadn’t seen from



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him since the year before, when he had an angry Dark Lord waltzing in and out of his head.

Could we really count on Tom not having become curious over what on earth was going on and deciding to check it out? It was Tom who had control of the connection after all.

Albus distracted Harry by changing the subject to Horcruxes and adventure soon after as he got to the office;

“Rage and resentment fought shock and excitement: For several moments Harry could not speak.”

And yet, over the following short exchange on the business of Horcrux hunting Harry’s anger and desire to do something risky “had increased tenfold.”

Over the course of OotP we had all learned to be suspicious of rages that come out of nowhere, or that increase exponentially when nothing in particular has happened. And I certainly could not think of any reason why a discussion of *Horcruxes* would have infuriated *Harry*.

And then Albus moves away from the window, and takes a closer look at Harry, and asks: “What has happened to you?”

Could Tom have opened the connection and been listening in?

Well, after watching Tom go personally checking on the status of his Horcruxes after the Gringotts heist, during the run-up to the climax of DHs and discovering the one in the cave missing, it is fairly clear now that he wasn’t.

But could Albus have *believed* that Tom had opened the connection and was listening in?

Did he see a shadow of Tom Riddle in Harry’s eyes?

And — letting the Polyjuice substitution theorists have their day, for the sake of argument — if that wasn’t Albus, but, just for exam-

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ple, Snape, would *he* have recognized a shadow of Tom behind Harry’s eyes?

Well, he’d had a whole school term the year before to have *learned* to.

Is that why — whichever one of them it was — he suddenly — after nearly six years — fails to insist that Harry give Snape his due of respect by insisting upon his referring to him as *Professor* Snape?

Is that why he carefully recounts the “likely story” of Snape’s supposed remorse upon taking up his teaching post. The story that Tom may have sent Snape off to Hogwarts to give to Albus?

Is that why he didn’t tell Harry the real reason *why* he trusts Snape?

Is that why he sent Harry off to “get his cloak”? To get him out of the room so he could warn his partner in this production that Tom is up to his old tricks again? (Or is that what that piece of advice was really about? We suddenly were given some reasons to be suspicious about that cloak in DHs.)

Did Tom manage to suppress his own feelings and stay with Harry? Is that why Albus was acting so peculiar for the rest of the evening? There was something awfully “stagy” about that whole performance in the cave.

While we’re at it: did Tom witness the murder of Albus Dumbledore?



Well, as to that last, no. He didn’t. Otherwise he would have known that it was Malfoy who disarmed Albus, even though it was Snape who killed him.

And for that matter we know that Tom had not tuned in, because Rowling directly contradicted that possibility by Tom’s

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actions in DHs. Harry spoke of capturing a Horcrux. Albus brought up the sea cave. Acto DHs we now know that Tom was not expecting anyone to have gotten into that sea cave, and until the Gringotts break-in and the theft of the Cup, he appears to have had no suspicion that anyone (other than he and probably Bellatrix) knew about his Horcruxes.

But, even though the possibility was flatly contradicted in DHs, it is a seductively easy speculation to propose that Tom's rage might have been added to Harry's in the exchange with Albus.

Or, when Harry brought up the subject of Draco celebrating in the RoR. The Scar-O-Vision reading would be tempting to draw upon in that case, too, since Tom would then have known that the invasion/assassination was likely to come off that same night — as soon as Albus was out of the castle — and he may have had matters of his own to tend to regarding it. That was certainly a larger team of DEs who showed up than you would have expected to turn up on less than an hour's notice. Particularly since these were all DEs who were walking free, with their own responsibilities, not Azkaban escapees collected into one secure location with nothing else to do but wait to be deployed at their master's whim. But, unfortunately there is altogether too much contradictory evidence strewn about in DHs which (for a wonder) is just plausible enough in itself to constitute a viable contradiction to John's theory.

If there had been any truth in John's theory, Tom would probably have been reported to have tuned out when Harry left to "get his cloak." He had already been given quite a bit of information in that exchange between Albus and Harry and

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he has no interest in Potter and his damn cloak or his boring friends. But from later developments we know that he wasn't there listening in at all.

But did Albus realize that? He was all too well aware of the possibility of Tom's "dropping in"

And both Albus AND Snape seemed to be playing to the balcony for the rest of the evening. Were they doing it just in case Tom did tune back in. (I mean, really, declaring; "I, the half-blood Prince!" just like a villain in a melodrama...)



And, in any event, there is also the simple fact that Harry did not get any twinges from his scar at any point during that evening.

But then, he didn't get any during the debriefing with Dumbledore at the end of OotP they year before either (although he had a couple of unexplained spikes of rage going into that interview). And I am $\frac{3}{4}$ convinced Tom was present for that meeting.

Possibly, just possibly, Tom had only just discovered — when he tried to possess the boy in the Atrium — that the scar functioned as an alarm system. Maybe once he realized that, he also understood that he needed to slide past it without setting it off. He already knew he *could* to do that, for he'd been managing it off and on all year. He just hadn't known he *needed* to. (Suggesting that while he could see and hear what Harry saw and heard, he could not feel what Harry physically felt until he physically possessed him.)

Albus only told Harry that he expected that he "wouldn't

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be having so much trouble from the scar” after that business of the Atrium. There would have been nothing to gain from telling the boy that Voldemort might have figured a way around that particular bit of “protection” as well. Particularly since Albus couldn’t have been sure that it would ever become an issue again at that point.

After all, it’s not as if the boy could do anything to effectively stop Tom.

And, after the fact, one now also wonders whether all of that ultimately useless distraction of giving us ‘The Life and Times of Tom Marvolo Riddle’ over the following year wasn’t yet another attempt at feeding Tom things he already knew — if he had actually decided to drop in and do a bit of poking around. For in the end, apart from giving us a clue about the Cup and the Locket, it certainly seemed to serve no other purpose than to pad out the page count of that book. It’s not like Harry was ever able to *use* any of that information for anything.

But I think that John might well be at least partially right. There may have been more “performance art” going on over the course of year 6 than I had originally realized.

The very possibility of Tom potentially *having* Scar-O-Vision at his disposal would certainly explain just about all of the vaguely screwy and contradictory statements we got from Albus over the course of the year, if he was hedging his bets and trying to inform Harry without letting Tom know just how much he had figured out, or exactly when he did so.

Even if it all turned out to be a case of fleeing when none pursueth.

Even though I think any chances that Tom had tuned in prior

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to the night of the sea cave adventure are negligible, Albus’s awareness that he *might* tune in could have led him to shave his statements accordingly.

And I’ll admit that until Rowling shot it down, I was trying very hard to resist adopting that particular theory wholesale.

It almost makes the whole thing too easy, y’know?



Nor, I now realize it, long after the fact, does it appear that the Occlumency lessons were the last time that we saw Snape make effective covert use of that Pensieve.

Yes, I’m talking about The Prince’s Tale.

Really. How likely is it that a dying man in his final moments of consciousness would have been able to expel so coherent, so complete, and so relevant a sequence of memories on command? I know that Snape appears to have had uncommon levels of mental organization and discipline, but that’s skills on a downright superhuman level.

Well, Snap. The truly *relevant* memory in that sequence was *already* in that Pensieve. It was in the Pensieve waiting for Harry by the time Snape left his office to go looking for him, right after he felt Alecto Carrow zap-call Tom with a Potter sighting. It would have taken only a moment to pull the memory of Albus’s last message and slip it into the Pensieve in the cabinet before leaving the office to meet his fate.

I do not know what he had planned to do if he had managed to address Harry directly. But I very much doubt that he was counting on being *able* to manage that.

Albus Dumbledore had saddled him with an impossible task.

The Pensieve Gambit

To pass a message to a boy who would never believe *anything* he told him? He could not just *tell* Potter Albus's message. And he already *knew* he could not simply tell the boy the message. He had to get the boy to *accept* the message. And there is no way that he could do that by giving him the message directly.

But he *could* goad that boy into looking into a Pensieve.

What he needed to give the boy was a *memory*. Not a message. The boy would certainly take a memory. He would snatch it up and be off to examine his prize. With the Pensieve already stocked with the relevant one, whatever memory Snape actually gave him could be *any* memory. And I suspect that he knew he could expel a memory even if he was in a full body bind. Harry couldn't speak or blink when Albus (or Draco) had him in one, but he could think, and I suspect that that is probably all that's needed to expel a memory — if you aren't trying to be tidy about it. All Snape had to do was remain conscious.

So we don't really know which memories it was that he expelled as he lay dying. Quite probably it was the whole irrelevance of his childhood with the Evans girls, which may have given a great deal of satisfaction to the fans, but had no bearing on Harry's great task. But the very fact that he lived long enough to expel *any* memory at all means that he died with the certain knowledge that he *had* fulfilled his task. The boy would not be able to resist a trip into Albus's Pensieve.

Which Harry found in the Headmaster's office waiting for him.



But, frankly, looking back through OotP, Snape's reactions and overall behavior throughout the whole Occlumency

The Pensieve Gambit

sequence was positively calibrated to make us all suspicious of Rowling's final intentions toward him. And it worked.

Upon completing my first reread of OotP I thought that there was an exceptionally good chance that the matter of Snape's true loyalties might become one of the central issues of either book 6 or 7. And it turned out that I was more right than I could have ever anticipated.

By the end of HBP the gloves were off. The Snape-watchers were right. Whatever else Snape was, he was NOT a "secondary character."

And Rowling's determination to treat him as such, and to dismiss him as much as possible throughout DHs is one of the many failures of that book.

(i.e., 'HARRY POTTER AND THE SNAPE-SHAPED HOLE', as it has been dubbed by at least a few other fans. Kind of says it all.)

I have said elsewhere, and had been saying ever since the last stretch of the 3-year summer, that I was confidently expecting Snape's loyalties to be called into question again, but there for a while it was almost beginning to look like the way this subject was going to be introduced was through Rowling progressively adding to the growing body of evidence that Dumbledore had made considerably more mistakes than the ones he admitted to, and that trusting Snape might turn out to be one of them.

And with Harry at the point of being determined to find something, *anything*, to blame Snape for — as he clearly seems to be by the end of OotP — if he was committed to closely *observing* Snape, it was only a matter of time before he would be convinced that he had discovered one.

And boy did Rowling hand us that one. In spades.



The Pensieve Gambit

But I was not prepared to swallow the post-HBP reading whole, either. I had not been convinced of Snape's unquestionable alliance with the forces of the Light at the end of GoF, and I was not convinced of his unquestionable allegiance to the Dark Lord at the end of HBP.

In fact, the opposite.

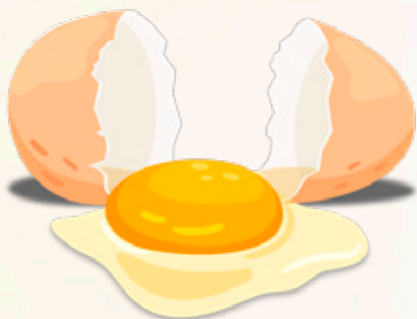
Yeah, that was the point where I finally got off the fence. He's a White Hat.

But, I will have to admit that it was only with HBP that I finally managed to fully appreciate the perfectly wonderful little Pot vs. Kettle moment that Snape had handed us in the opening to those Occlumency lessons in the previous book.

You know; where he sniffily informs us (and Harry) that Legilimency is not mere "mind-reading" and that it is the people who wallow in sad memories, and wear their hearts on their sleeves who are easy prey for Lord Voldemort.

Excuse me Severus, but just who is it that we all know who stalks about in black-on-black relieved only by festive touches of black, and fills up every space in Hogwarts that he is given to call his own with *gruesome images*?

Oh, yes, that's right, Severus. *You*.



Exeunt Albus: Setting the Stage

This essay and its companion piece needed to be left pretty much as-is, even if quite a bit of the reasoning in them (circa 2006) turned out to have been proved wrong. Of course a fair amount of it turned out to be proved right, too.

A very early iteration of the reasoning explored in this pair of essays was featured in the published collection; 'WHO KILLED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE?' and it seems only proper to retain that connection, even though these online versions of the essay have continued to be developed well after the book was released. There is also a degree of annotation in light of DHs. Although not a lot of it. I tend to reject pretty much everything that was introduced in DHs. Very little of that book's reasoning makes sense.

But the overall point of this pair of essays has always been to examine a wider range of possibilities related to the death of Albus Dumbledore as they presented themselves at the end of HBP.

Once examined, there turned out to be *quite* a range.



Rowling turned out to have done it again. Back in 2005 I had put together what I thought was a rather clever theory of 'The Sorting Hat Horcrux' which finally made a degree of sense out of the grossly unbalanced view of the whole Gryffindor/Slytherin face-off which we have been spoon-fed over the course of the series. She shot it down for Christmas.

In the spring of 2006 I had belatedly jumped onto the Dumbledore-isn't-Dead bandwagon and crafted what I thought was nice, logical, canon-supported interpretation of the events of HBP which explained the multiple screwinesses on display in



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“the murder of Albus Dumbledore — not!” as it was presented in the book, which she shot down a few days before my birthday.

Since I’d only been riding that particular bandwagon for about 3 months, being tossed summarily onto the roadbed was only injurious to my dignity, but it was a shock, nevertheless. Because the account we were given of that death, as it is presented in canon, still just plain *didn’t* add up.

This second upset was all the more of an embarrassment since the collection of essays referred to in the intro that the original iteration of this pair were developed from (‘WHO KILLED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE?’ Zossima Press, November 2006) was all but ready to go to press when she made her announcement, and sent all of us collaborators scrambling to apply emergency patches.

This version and its companion are subsequent rewrites, which entailed another year of yet further development by the release of DHs. Consequently, even that early this iteration no longer quite matched up to the one printed in our book.

I will not, however, be rolling those discredited portions of the original version into the 7th Son collection of exploded theories. The more so in that upon even a fairly cursory review, about 90% of the reasoning is still basically watertight. However, neither will I be trumpeting the points upon which I turned out to be right. Or, not much.

And even downstream of DHs a great deal more of it still plays than doesn’t.



But I am going to have to admit that I sat there in stunned disbelief reading the relevant passage of HBP. Not, mind you,

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in disbelief that Severus Snape, to all appearances, had just murdered Albus Dumbledore, but that Rowling had actually chosen to go there.

Y’see, over on the behemoth AOL list group, HPfor-Grownups, back toward the end of the 3-year summer, I myself had come out and proposed that Severus Snape would be forced to murder Albus Dumbledore in order to pacify Voldemort. And that Albus might well agree to it! That was all the way back in 2002!

Admittedly, that particular posting was also some weeks or months before my 11th-hour realization that Snape probably *had* been present at the graveyard muster in Little Hangleton (a realization now shown to be wrong) and that nobody in charge of either side was suspecting Snape of *anything* (a conclusion now understood to be correct), which seemed to me to eliminate any need for the justification of such melodramatic shows of fanatic loyalty. I’m afraid that once I’ve thoroughly dismissed a possibility it’s sometimes extremely difficult for me to ever take it seriously again.

After this long a period I doubt whether the relevant posts are still in the archives over on AOL, but even if they were it would probably be a waste of your time to try to dig them out.

So, what on earth did we have now? Apart from a royal mess.



Well: first off, we really *did* have to ask ourselves whether Albus was actually dead. At least until Rowling clarified the matter publicly. Which wasn’t until more than a year after HBP was released.

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It was not all that difficult to get the impression that he wasn't. The account of his death was just... wrong.

In addition; by that time, most of the fans were very well aware that once an element gets used in the course of this series, it seems exponentially more likely than not to be used again. Typically more than once. Neither could it escape anyone's recollection that one of the major plot elements of PoA was the discovery that Peter Pettigrew had faked his own death (twice, in fact). And so, for that matter, had Barty Crouch Jr, with his parents' assistance, one book later in GoF.

So another faked death certainly appeared to be liable to be on the menu for Book 6 or Book 7. In fact, a version of such a faked death was even waved under our noses. Slughorn's little welcome tableau when he was overtaken by magical intruders makes a very nice echo of Scabbers's second faked death in Gryffindor Tower. It doesn't serve to balance Pettigrew's publicly — and far more significantly faked — death back in '81. But it did certainly serve to put us on our guard for the possibility of a reprise.

And we really had a very short list of viable candidates for characters who were central enough to the main issues to serve as potential subjects for such a faked death. At a glance, these were only Albus Dumbledore and Regulus Black. Either of whom had custody of information of which we appeared to be in some need.

And then, just to make sure that we clueless Yanks didn't overlook the possibility; we were also handed a very heavy hint from the U.S. publishers that we really ought to be suspecting that a faked death, or that a death which may be believed to

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have been faked would figure somewhere in the series conclusion. Just compare the two versions of the following from the chapter of 'The Lightning-Struck Tower':

U.K. version (page 552–553):

"No, you can't," said Malfoy, his wand hand shaking very badly indeed. "Nobody can. He told me to do it or he'll kill me. I've got no choice."

"Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight to hide her likewise. Your father is safe at the moment.."

U.S. version (page 591–592):

"No, you can't," said Malfoy, his wand hand shaking very badly indeed. "Nobody can. He told me to do it or he'll kill me. I've got no choice."

"He cannot kill you if you are already dead. Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight to hide her likewise. Nobody would be surprised that you had died in your attempt to kill me — forgive me, but Lord Voldemort probably expects it. Nor would Death Eaters be surprised that we had captured and killed your mother — it is what they would do themselves, after all. Your father is safe at the moment."

Rowling is reported to have authorized that addition to Scholastic's edition of the early printings of the hardcover edi-

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tion of HBP. (Although it should be noted that the added statements were later excised from the U.S. paperback edition of the work.) If nothing else, it appears to be a pretty strong indication that we are dealing with a milieu in which faked deaths are to be considered a hot possibility. Particularly after such twists had already played major roles in the resolutions of both Book 3, and Book 4.

(ETA: as it turns out, Malfoy Manor was probably DE Central all through Book 6, and possibly as early as Book 5. Narcissa was effectively a hostage in her own home for the entire time. Had Draco accepted Albus's offer, and Albus sent anyone from the Order to retrieve her, they would have likely got a nasty surprise. Why Albus hadn't considered *that* is impossible to guess. Unless his offer of protection was just a bluff that he knew wouldn't be accepted. And if it had been, *Albus* would hardly have been in any position to facilitate the offer that he was making. I mean, really, how was that supposed to work?)



Added to which, there was something very *obviously* screwy about the AK which is supposed to have actually killed Dumbledore.

Harry had his eyes tight shut from the pain in his scar when Cedric Diggory was murdered, but I still think he might have registered the difference in the sound of a body simply dropping from a standing position and one being tossed into the air and dropped from a great height. And he doesn't seem to have registered anything of the sort.

Or did he? I'll be taking a closer look at that particular

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sequence later on.

With Albus, on the other hand:

U.S. Edition (page 596)

"A jet of green light shot from the end of Snape's wand and hit Dumbledore squarely in the chest. Harry's scream of horror never left him; silent and unmoving, he was forced to watch as Dumbledore was blasted into the air. For a split second, he seemed to hang suspended beneath the shining skull, and then he slowly fell backward, like a great rag doll, over the battlements and out of sight."

All things considered: that is just plain *weird*.

Actually, that sounds like something out of an Arcade game.

Still... for months after the release of HBP I still thought our best candidate for the "I'm not dead yet" sweeps was Regulus Black. His death was more to the pattern set by Pettigrew's (i.e., it happened years ago). Plus, we'd all sorts of other sources for discovering Albus's secrets: there's the Pensieve, into which we've seen a lot of memories placed, but very few removed. There is his Portrait, and there is Aberforth. For that matter, there are also Mad-Eye Moody, Horace Slughorn, Professor Flitwick and Minerva McGonagall, all of whom worked with the man for decades. There is even old Griselda Marchbanks, and Neville's Gran. On the other hand, if Reggie's true tale was to be told, he would probably have to tell it himself. Because there didn't seem to be anyone else around to do it for him.

We also still needed to find out whether or not he managed to destroy the stolen Horcrux, at least. And whether his really was the Locket.

So, for several months I suspected that a visit to Ms Doris

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Purkiss in Little Norton might be in order. Stubby Boardman's retirement from public life (and the popular singing group, The Hobgoblins), a convenient 15 years before the QUIBBLER article which "outed" him coincided very nicely with the date of Reggie's purported death.

Of course, given that Doris was claiming that Sirius Black/Stubby Boardman had to be innocent of the murders in '81 because he had been with her at the time, it seemed a good chance that she hasn't seen him in a while...

But by the time the last book was pending, I was no longer so convinced that Reggie's full tale really did need to be told. (And Rowling had shot down the Stubby Boardman line of inquiry in one of her interviews, in any case.)

Nor was I still convinced that the function of any revelation of a faked death in Book 7 was likely to be for the purpose of giving us an additional source of information. Instead, I had come to the conclusion that the whole issue of Regulus Black was a smokescreen, and that like that street full of Muggles back in 1981, we may have watched Albus and Snape fake Albus's death right before our eyes. For there was certainly something more going on atop the Astronomy tower than anyone was admitting.



Well, as Rowling told us; no, he really was dead.

Rowling has admitted in some older interviews that she enjoys the theories that fans come up with concerning her characters and the actions taking place off the radar over the course of her series. She claims that she only takes the trouble to shoot them down when they are leading into a completely blind alley.



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So if she is announcing to all viewers on a worldwide broadcast that Albus Dumbledore is dead, then it behooves us to take that statement under strong consideration.

Not that she hadn't lied to us in interviews before, of course. Or since.

And for that matter even her supposedly clear statement of August 2006 turns out not to be anywhere near as clear as the newsbites would have had us believe. The following is from a partial transcript posted on the LiveJournal of a fan, as to the actual wording of that statement:

Child: How could Albus Dumbledore really be dead? Harry is so loyal to him and Dumbledore's the most powerful wizard.

JKR (looking a little emo): "I really can't answer that question, but... you shouldn't expect Dumbledore to do a Gandalf."

"Really can't answer that", indeed. If, even then, J.K. Rowling still couldn't come straight out and say that Albus was dead because Snape killed him, she was probably up to her tricks again.

But for all that she had now supposedly given us the final word on this issue, she still was being mighty blooming evasive about it.

In her statement of August, 2006 she tells us all that Dumbledore is "definitely dead." I was sure that by August of 2006, he was. The *story*, however was taking place a decade earlier. She states that he is "not going to pull a Gandalf." Well, no, I didn't think that he was going to show up on a white horse and lead the troops into battle either. But neither of these statements throws any light on the sheer weirdness that she



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purposely wrote into the scene of his supposed murder.

And it certainly does not make his death, as it was presented to us any more credible. There is still a whole lot that is distinctly “off” about that death.

It finally registered that the real issue isn’t one of whether or not his death might have been “faked”; but the clear fact that it was unquestionably *staged*.



The whole run-up to the murder of Albus Dumbledore, from the chapter of the Seer Overheard, through the adventure of The Cave, to the Lightning-Struck Tower, and the Flight of the Prince (U.S. edition, pages 544–610) are Rowling at her most dramatic. In fact this sequence was probably the longest stretch of sustained “drama” in the series up to that date. And, with all due respect; drama is no more Rowling’s OTG (one-true-genre) than romance is. Indeed, while the sequence is more-or-less effectively presented, it does manage to tip well over the edge, and pitches us right into melodrama. In fact, a rather cheesy melodrama.

But the series as a whole is not really a melodrama, is it?

We certainly didn’t think so up through GoF.

I finally had to step back and consider that if this was a conspiracy to falsify the circumstances of Albus Dumbledore’s death, then we have to admit to the possibility that for at least part of the time, everyone actually engaged in the conspiracy was *acting*. And some of them may just not be all that good at it.

Which raises a lot of other questions and drags in all sorts of related matters. Such as:

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We not only needed to ask whether or not Albus was really dead — and we *did* need to at least *ask* that question — but whether, and just how much was Albus taken by surprise by the events that overtook him on the night of his murder. And by which ones, exactly? How much of that performance was under his own control?

Just where does that overheard argument with Snape, that Hagrid reported fit into the picture? That wasn’t a part of the public performance. What were they arguing about?

For that matter where does the Unbreakable Vow fit into this? How much was Snape taken by surprise by the terms of that? Or was he taken by surprise at all? And did he *really* know what Draco’s mission was, or did he just pretend to, in order to lure the sisters into being indiscreet? And, if that was the case, why didn’t he even allow them to discuss the matter?

And just what exactly was Malfoy’s mission and what did his conduct contribute to the equation? Because the mission, and the Vow, and the murder are all so closely interrelated that you can hardly discuss any one of them without having to discuss both the others as well.

Also, where does the sea cave adventure come into it? Because the sea cave junket is also intrinsic to this puzzle. That wasn’t just an irrelevant side trip, either.

We also need to consider the likelihood of there being at least a “third man” (to deal with the body?) involved in any suspected conspiracy regarding the murder of Albus Dumbledore, because Snape and Albus couldn’t have managed the wrap-up of their performance between only the two of them. In fact there may have been more than one additional conspirator. Or

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at least a facilitator.

And, right off the top, we need to ask just why they did it at all? Why not just keep dodging that particular bullet as long as they could?



Well, once again we need to remind ourselves of another of our main axioms.

Remember: the *villain* is the story.

Rowling clearly doesn't believe this. She takes no interest in her villains. Which might be why her story started unraveling as soon as she dragged her über-villain onstage.

We lost track of one of our main players over the course of HBP. We were so wrapped up in following the trajectory of young Tom Riddle that we completely lost sight of the present day Lord Voldemort. What was he up to after he dropped Malfoy into the soup at the opening of the book, and boogied off?

We don't know, do we

Was there any purpose, any purpose at all, to that stream of reports in the DAILY PROPHET of DE raids, Imperius attacks, Dementor attacks, and random violence? Beyond the obvious purpose of keeping people frightened, that is?

It sure doesn't look like it from where I'm standing. That was all just keeping the pot well stirred.

And, for that matter, after his presumably public ultimatum to Fudge at the beginning of July, and his suspected "personal" murder of Amelia Bones around the same time, was there any report of anyone having caught even a glimpse of him all year long?

Not that I noticed.

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At a guess, I'd have said he had another one of his Byzantine plots in the pipeline. Probably a big one, too. And it wasn't ready to be launched over the course of HBP. (Note: Rowling hinted as much in her public statement after Lord Voldemort won the popular vote as most frightening villain in September's Big Bad Read of 2006.)

And, at a guess: first, he needed a lot more Dementors.

Second: Albus Dumbledore needed to be out of the way. It didn't need to happen right that moment, because his main operation had any number of other components that were going to take time to develop, and it was going to take him several months to a year to get his ducks in a row before he could launch whatever it was. But it needed to happen. And it needed to happen by the end of the academic year.

That sudden shift of Tom's attention from Potter to Dumbledore is the kind of thing that ought to have made Albus and Severus both sit up and take notice. Which I think it did.

In the first place this was a warning that Tom may have figured out that the kid was his final Horcrux. At the very least, it was a heavy hint that he really might have eavesdropped on Harry's debriefing after the raid on the DoM, and now knows that he has to kill the boy himself (which does appear to be the case although there was never any overt confirmation of it). In the meantime, he has returned to Plan A. Kill Dumbledore. In fact he has bumped that item to the head of his to-do list.

Lord Voldemort wants Albus Dumbledore dead. Within the coming year.



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This forces Snape and Albus to consider their options. On matters like the life or death of an individual wizard, Lord Voldemort generally does get what he wants. Eventually. This factor throws an unacceptable level of uncertainty into their long-range plans. They know that sooner or later Tom Riddle is going to succeed in removing Albus from his path.

For that matter, it seems evident that by the time the Black sisters showed up on his doorstep, Snape was already under orders regarding the Headmaster's death. He had certainly already been ordered by Tom to stand aside and let young Malfoy have a go at him, first. (ETA: By this time we also know he was under orders from Albus as well.)

Snape was probably not told the details of Malfoy's orders, but he certainly knew his own. He claims to be one of the few who knows of the plan (very little of it, I suspect, at least officially). And his statement that "He intends me to do it in the end, I think" is probably no less than the truth. So even before the Unbreakable Vow entered the equation, Snape seems to have already been cast as Second Murderer. And he would have reported as much to Albus.

So, consider. Was it likely to be a bigger risk to openly thwart Lord Voldemort for as long as they are able, or to let him think he's got what he wants?

Or to *give* him what he thinks he wants? Hold that thought, too. Has Albus *already* tangled with the Ring? Did Tom only order Malfoy to murder Albus after he learned that Albus had managed to curse himself?



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Which opens up another line of enquiry. If Snape reported that Albus has managed to curse himself, and that the curse is fatal, then why would Tom make a point of assigning Albus's murder to Draco? Albus will be dead within a year *anyway*. Why not just let the curse run its course?

I've come to the conclusion that the whole assignment of murdering Albus was simply another setup *specifically* designed to torment the Malfoys. Lucius in particular.

But our current concern is Snape and Albus.

Are they more likely to be able to benefit from openly thwarting Tom for as long as they are able, or from letting him think he's got what he wants?

Have they *also* got something to gain from the death (in this year) of Albus Dumbledore?

Let's explore the concept, as a concept, for a few moments.

Whatever it is that Riddle has planned — and it is highly unlikely that Snape has any details on whatever is planned — are they going to be in a stronger position to derail whatever it is, in trying to keep Riddle delaying the launching of it by openly thwarting him (and will that even put the launching of his plan off, and how long is Snape's cover going to hold under those circumstances?) or to let him think that he is the one in control, opposed by only a headless Order and an ineffectual Ministry — with Albus off the radar, and Snape in a position to perform sabotage from deep cover?

In the handful of weeks since Voldemort was forced into the open, the public perception of the progress of the war has drastically shifted. Snape can now do Voldemort far more damage from inside the DEs than he can from the periphery



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at Hogwarts. Voldemort can number about 3–4 dozen human followers and one saboteur can make a big difference in a group of that size. Albus was in a position to watch that kind of thing take place in his Order, over the last year of the first war, thanks to Pettigrew.

This is also probably one of the main reasons that Albus finally gave Snape the DADA position; so Snape would *have* to leave the school before the year was out and Voldemort would not be in any position to raise objections, since he set that situation up himself by cursing the post in the first place. Therefore, Albus used Voldemort's demand for his own death as a way to facilitate Snape's removal from the school; abandoning his post before the jinx got out of control and bit him in some undetermined manner.

And I'd say that if this was the case, they left it pretty late — for now that we know that the jinx is real we have to take its possible actions into account in any of our calculations, too. We've never seen a DADA instructor make it to the end of June. (Lockhart didn't make it all the way through May.) Eventually something was going to blow up that would send Snape packing.

— Unless Albus finally took the opportunity to lift the jinx, assuming that he could have, and get it out of their way. So that Snape's flight only looked like the jinx leaping into action.

And what kind of a backlash might lifting that jinx have produced? We know that the jinx has killed at least one man already. Could that be what really finally doomed Albus? Is that what it required to lift the jinx? That Albus should take it on himself?

Could the jinx have been tied to Albus's tenure as Headmas-

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ter in the first place? Will his successors even need to deal with it?

(Well, as Rowling informs us, no. It was tied to Tom Riddle's own life. Once he was most sincerely dead the jinx ended. Of course that information isn't actually *in the books...*)

For that matter; was Snape really the DADA instructor that year at all? Or did Albus officially reinstate himself as the instructor of record that year? With Snape merely deputized to teach the open classes.

You *could* make a passable argument that Albus was teaching DADA that year, even if to only one student, part time. The announcement at the opening feast was that Snape would be "taking over" the position of DADA teacher. He's substituted as DADA instructor before without ill effect. (Unless getting knocked out in the Shrieking Shack by three of his own students was actually the jinx taking a swipe at him in passing.)



Once considered, Snape and Albus may have decided that they had a quite lot to gain by letting Albus "die" on his own terms, and at a date of his own choosing rather than Voldemort's. There is more going on in this so-called war than just a hunt for Tom Riddle's Horcruxes, after all.

Speaking of which; Harry is going to need to be assigned his mission a year early. Because Dumbledore simply isn't going to be around to wait for him to finish school.

And, we can see that at the end of Year 6, Harry is still missing crucial information concerning that mission. Information that I suspect Albus was too cagey to share with anyone else, and now there isn't time. Albus had no choice but to retire to

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the sidelines and work indirectly if at all. (Would the Albus we thought we were dealing with really have withheld information likely to be so vital as that; “Yes Harry, you can trust Snape, and here is why,” unless he was confident of the necessary information getting to the boy by the time he really needed it?)

And, besides, if Potter does take his mission up now, and does not return to Hogwarts for his final year of school, Albus will not be in the best position to protect him from the vantage point of his position as Headmaster. Any way you slice it, it is time for Albus to leave his nice tower office in the fastness of Hogwarts Castle and do the job he has been putting off ever since Tom Riddle returned from his very first exile and started kicking up larks, back around 1960.

Harry is also going to need to have Voldemort’s attention diverted from him, and Albus would probably be able to do a better job of that from behind the scenes, NOT hampered by his high-profile position or his duties as Headmaster of a school. That’s the main thing Albus really sacrificed; his position as Headmaster. And it WAS a sacrifice. He really enjoyed having that job. Tom was definitely not the first unhappy, fatherless boy to regard Hogwarts as his “real” home.

And, besides, Albus didn’t know that he was a fictional character in a series that has only one more book to run. He didn’t know that there was only one more year until the conclusion of this war. He had all of his eggs in one basket with Harry Potter’s name on it and he needed to protect his investment.

He can no longer do it directly. He’s got to distract Voldemort’s attention to somewhere else and let Harry get on with it. He really can’t micro-manage the hunt for the Horcruxes.

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Back when we still had hopes of a plausible conclusion to this series, we expected that between Albus (or the memory of Albus) and Snape they probably hoped to keep Voldemort busy and distracted, and that if they could manage to encourage dissension in the DE’s ranks and whittle down those ranks a bit further that would be all to the good. (Snape would at the very least be in a position to learn some of the remaining DE’s names that aren’t already known, which would come in handy in the final mop-up stage after Voldemort falls.)



Well, okay. As a *concept* it makes a certain kind of sense. Enough to have made the possibility of a faked death a viable plot option. But Rowling assures us it isn’t the option she took.

And even if she had, we were not going to be in the best position to witness it.

Because, I was sure that regardless of whether Albus Dumbledore was alive or dead, so long as we were viewing the action through the Harry filter, Albus was going to stay quite thoroughly off the radar. We could not reasonably expect to come face to face with him again, as himself, in any form (other than perhaps his portrait), until after the threat of Voldemort was settled. (ETA: In the event, this statement was almost correct. We did not see Albus Dumbledore face to face until the threat of Voldemort’s extra Horcrux was settled.)



By the way, Rowling was quite right when she speaks of the requirements of the sort of story she claimed to be telling us.

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In a coming-of-age Heroic quest the old wizard with the long white beard is never going to settle the central problem on the young hero's behalf. That is something the young hero has got to do for himself. But the old man can do any number of things behind the scenes to smooth the way.

Young heroes on a coming-of-age quest just about always have to go the last stretch on their own. On the other hand, traditional heroes in just about every fairy tale you care to mention always are given help that they have earned by means of kindness or courtesy to others. Harry should be eligible to receive such help and advice for quite a while yet along his Hero's Journey. And he is likely to need every bit of it.

ETA: The only real problem with this reasoning is that in the wake of DHs, we have to conclude that the story of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord was never a coming-of-age quest at all. It just played one in the movies.

And, unlike in traditional tales, 90% of the help and advice Harry was given along the way in DHs was *not* earned. It was delivered to him by the universe, unasked. Which was highly unsatisfactory to the reader. But that is an issue for a different essay, on a different day.



We also have the faint, rather unpleasant possibility that Albus could not see any way in which Harry could get out of this tangle alive. I think it is clear that Albus was very much aware that the boy was Tom's 6th Horcrux. And he may not have known of any certain manner in which the Horcrux might be disarmed *without* killing Harry. Neither fiendfyre nor Bas-



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ilisk venom were capable of achieving that after all. And we know of no other certain prodedures that would have. His exhortations on Death being no more than the next great adventure, his repeated affirmations that Harry's greatest strength is his ability to love others — and that he is forever marked by his mother's loving sacrifice; even the forced witnessing of the demonstration of his own murder may have been in the way of forcing the concept of a possible self-sacrifice into Harry's head, should such a thing prove necessary.

But I nevertheless suspected that if the Order of the Phoenix was still even a relevant element in this story, the Order knew that Albus was still with them. He sent his message out at his funeral. He still had his organization, and the organization knew it still had its Leader. After a fashion, anyway.

Although, insofar as that goes; at the end of HBP, you don't really get the feeling that Harry regards the Order as particularly relevant, do you? And we are going to be getting the rest of the story from his PoV.

ETA: Indeed, that part of the theory certainly *didn't* work out. The Order's leader was actually Alastor Moody, and once he was gone, the Order pretty much fell apart. Although they did manage to cobble together Potterwatch and keep it running. For whatever good that was worth. It certainly didn't inspire the public to resist the takeover of their own govenment. If anything, it only encouraged people to continue to expect Harry Potter to solve all their problems for them.



Albus was not immortal, nor did he appear to wish to be.



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He did probably still wish to be the Master of Death, but we have no clear idea of what he thought *that* was going to be able to accomplish (it *would* be useful to have his interpretation of what he thought being the “Master of Death” is supposed to *mean*). Nevertheless, to die, or to depart peacefully after seeing his “great work” accomplished, and to pass the torch to others would be perfectly in keeping with tradition. But the inconvenient fact is that Albus’s great work was NOT yet accomplished.

Still, IF Snape and Albus were engaged in a conspiracy to make an all-star production out of Albus’s murder, they certainly did not do it on the spur of the moment, and they did not do it at all unless they felt they had no other, or no better choice.

They certainly took all year to set it up. Nor would they have left anything more to chance than they had to. They had to have gone over every new detail, as it came up, to see how it could be turned to their advantage. At least insofar as they hoped to be able to finish off this phase of the war in a controlled descent rather than an ignominious rout.

Nor is an elaborate set-up leading to a staged death beyond Albus’s capabilities. It isn’t even slightly out of character. In the course of the series as it already stood we had watched Albus Dumbledore orchestrate two elaborate year-long scams which ran over the entire course of both Book 1 and Book 5. (Each of which resulted in a death, if you stop to recall. Even though neither death had been included in the plan.) It is not too much to consider that he may have done so over the course of Book 6 as well, even if this was not a reflection of anything that we had encountered back in Book 2. And, for

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that matter, we had no reason to suspect there might not have been another such scam running behind the scenes in Book 7.

Throughout the course of HBP Dumbledore was continually handing out statements that he is old, he is slowing down, he is expendable. His request all the way back in Chapter 3, that the Dursleys continue to give Harry house room for as long as the protection on him lasts has all the ring of a “last request.” He is putting his affairs in order. His exit this year, genuine or otherwise, is *planned*.



Of course in order to extrapolate a conspiracy you have to be able to map it to the data you’ve already got to work from, and it has to fit. You cannot arbitrarily adjust events that are known to have taken place. Which means you have to consider the timing.

So does the timing of what we know allow for a conspiracy between Snape and Albus concerning the matter of Albus’s death?

Yes. It does. Oh, but definitely.

Admittedly, most of Act I, Scene I of the set-up period took place during the hectic first couple of weeks of the summer. Completely off Harry’s radar.

And just how hectic was it? Well, read on. This chronology has been tweaked and reworked a few times and I think that I finally have most of the events noted and accounted for, in pretty much the proper order. But I can’t be altogether certain to the minute. I don’t think Rowling could be altogether certain to the minute. But it looks like the interval of time between

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Harry's raid on the DoM and his arrival at the Burrow, early in July, was one of the busiest periods in the whole series for the rest of the wizarding world.

For one thing, it sounds like the first thing Scrimgeour did when he got the post of Minister for Magic was to hold his unsuccessful meeting with Dumbledore. This must have taken place only a day or so before Scrimgeour's meeting with the Muggle Prime Minister. We only saw the first couple of paragraphs of the article reporting his meeting with Albus in the PROPHECY, but there was no mention made of Dumbledore having a blasted hand in what we could see of the PROPHECY's report, and I suspect that there was no such mention in the rest of the article either, or Snape would have hardly needed to feed that information to the two Black sisters when they showed up at Spinner's End.

The wording of the chapter opening for the meeting at Spinner's End also strongly suggests that it is taking place later the same day as Fudge and Scrimgeour's meeting with the Muggle PM. By which time Dumbledore was already injured. This would also be the same day that Draco was given his mission by Tom.

The events which we know to have taken place during this interval are:

Phase I: taking place after the conclusion of the OWL.s in mid-June:

- 1 Harry's raid(s) on the DoM / Ministry finally admits Voldemort has returned / VoldWar II officially begins.
- 2 Last two weeks or so of school / calls for Fudge's resignation begin / recovery of those injured in the raid /

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school breaks up for the summer.

Phase II: first week of July, approximate (could overlap with Phase I):

- 3 Voldemort's public ultimatum that Fudge step aside in his favor / Fudge's refusal.
- 4 Murder of Amelia Bones / bridge collapse / Giant attack in West Country / attempt made to put Muggle Junior Minister under Imperius / murder of Emmeline Vance in vicinity of Muggle PM's office
- 5 Fudge's resignation; Scrimgeour's appointment as Minister / meeting between Scrimgeour and Dumbledore / Kingsley Shacklebolt goes undercover in Muggle PM's office / mass Dementor attacks.
- 6 Albus vs. Horcrux — Snape intervention / Scrimgeour's meeting with Muggle Prime Minister / Malfoy is assigned his mission / Spinner's End meeting, later the same day.
- 7 Two weeks after end of term; Albus collects Harry from the Dursleys' / visit to Horace Slughorn / Harry arrives at the Burrow for the summer.

One could wish that Rowling, who is capable of sound plotting, when she wants to be, were a little more dependable with timelines. Her shaky grasp of numbers erodes our confidence, even when there are no obvious contradictions. But still, HBP isn't the first of the books in the series which proved to have had a timeline-sensitive plot running in the background and under the surface. She can do it, and when she does, it generally works. Admittedly, Snape and Albus's presumed actions are tucked in around the edges of the above to the point that it is almost as difficult to trace them as it is to trace Hagrid's and

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Harry's movements during the infamously "missing" 24 hours.

We also do not know just what actually happened to Emmeline Vance. Given that the first chapter of HBP opens to discover the Muggle PM reflecting on the week past which had seen a bridge collapse, a "hurricane" in the West Country, the peculiar behavior of a Junior Minister, and two highly publicized murders, and we later are told that Fudge was replaced as Minister for Magic only three days before he shows up in the PM's office to introduce his successor, the whole of the list of events under item #4 seem to have taken place over the course of no more than about four days.

Fudge (who really does seem to be a chatty little man) also tells us that his own constituency had been howling for his replacement for the previous fortnight. Presumably as part of the fallout from the raid on the DoM, which took place immediately following the OWL.s in mid-June, and which was paired with the wizarding public's discovery that the Ministry had been lying to them, denying Voldemort's return, which had been reported in the DAILY PROPHET immediately afterward, a week or two before Voldemort delivered his ultimatum.

Indeed, given the rising public demand for Fudge's resignation, one wonders just what Tom had to gain by that silly ultimatum. Just as with the DADA post, he cannot have seriously expected to be given what he claimed to be asking for.

What I think may have been going on, is that Fudge was regarded by Tom to be too potentially useful (he had already unwittingly been *very* useful) to be thrown into the obscurity which seemed all too likely to soon be the result of Tom's unmasking. Particularly since Tom still had poten-

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tial links to Umbridge through which to manipulate her, and Fudge along with her. (And no, Malfoy had not been his only link to Umbridge, just the closest one. There were others to take up the slack.)

We can see that by the nonsensical ultimatum Tom produced the end result of making Fudge look rather good at the end of his term of office. And, indeed, Fudge was not even dismissed from the Minister's office, he has merely been demoted, and I honestly thought that we hadn't seen the last of him.

I was sure Tom still had moles in the Ministry (which turned out to be the case. At the very least he had Yaxley), and that Fudge might end up reinstated. Ergo; he was too useful a puppet to be completely dispensed with. This reasoning, of course, went nowhere.

It is also clear that the DEs were very active in the vicinity of the Muggle government offices over that week. By the opening of the story, from the general level of DE activity, not to mention Kingsley Shacklebolt's current assignment, it seemed that not only the Ministry's Aurors, but the Order of the Phoenix as well was involved in a concerted effort to engage with them. Since we know really nothing of Madam Vance but her name, it is uncertain whether her involvement in the events of that week were due to her membership in the Order of the Phoenix, or as a result of her capacity as a Ministry employee. But the location that her death appeared to have taken place, (around the corner from the PM's office) strongly suggests that she was probably engaged in some official activity to do with the war. Madam Vance was one of the original Members of the Order. I contend that most of the core of the original Order were people

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who were known to have engaged in an active resistance to Lord Voldemort. In other words, she was already on the “most wanted dead” list.

What seems most likely, if we agree that Snape is a White Hat, is that Snape had indeed passed information regarding Vance’s mission to the DEs. Information that the Order, or Albus at any rate, probably knew that he had passed, or had even intended for him to pass as a part of setting up a sting, and that Madam Vance was unlucky enough to have been captured and killed in the confrontation. We do not know whether the DEs also took losses. If they did, they didn’t leave the bodies behind.

Snape, who was probably still in the north at the time of the confrontation, took what advantage he could of the situation by claiming credit for the information leading to her capture. That he claims credit only for passing information in itself suggests that he was not present for whatever the operation was.

One might suppose that Snape would have had to have still been at Hogwarts when Albus made his raid on the Horcrux. But this seems not to have been the case. Dumbledore claims to have summoned Snape to Hogwarts upon his return, after destroying — or, at any rate, acquiring — the Peverill Ring. Since Snape is known by the DEs to be a spy, it would not compromise his cover to receive and respond to such a summons.

The timing of such a summons might have revealed Albus’s misadventure to Tom, if it had interrupted Snape’s report on the events of Year 5.

By that time, Albus had already had his fruitless meeting with Scrimgeour and concluded that he could not work with the man.

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That may have been what made Albus decide to finally take the Ring (and the Locket?) out of the picture. At once.

With such results and repercussions that resulted in his decision to make a production of his own inevitable death by the end of the year.



We do not know how much Voldemort was told of Dumbledore’s injury, although it does seem clear that he was aware of it. But, even if Snape knew about the Horcruxes (which I suspected), he did not “officially” know of them, so what Voldemort was probably told was that Dumbledore had tangled with something that he could not counter, and had sustained permanent injury to his wand hand.

Given the speed at which Malfoy is assigned his mission, I think Voldemort had already received Snape’s report that Albus had weakened himself.

Snape is unquestionably at his own home at Spinner’s End the evening of the day that Draco was formally assigned his mission. Dumbledore had already been injured by that point. At some point before this date Snape has already been in contact with Voldemort and been given a kernel of information which at the very least enabled him to make his claim of having known what Malfoy would be ordered to do, and incidentally to find himself lumbered with Pettigrew in his own household. He seems clearly not to have been at the meeting in which Voldemort actually gave Malfoy his assignment, which is likely to have been earlier the same day that Narcissa and Bellatrix showed up on his doorstep, at dusk (which in the midlands at

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the end of June or beginning of July, would be fairly late in the evening). I can not imagine that upon learning of this assignment, that Narcissa — in the state she was in — would have even waited overnight before attempting to enlist help and protection for her son.

So, extrapolating the Snape thread in all this:

Snape finishes his duties at Hogwarts, perhaps a day or so after the students leave and returns to Spinner's End. He reports to Voldemort, accounts for his actions regarding the raid on the DoM (probably claims to have been off in the forbidden forest searching for Umbridge, Granger and Potter who had all gone missing), and gets debriefed regarding his dealings with Dolores, and Dumbledore's return to the school. He may also pass along the information related to Emmeline Vance.

Upon returning home — or possibly before leaving Voldemort's presence — he is summoned by Dumbledore after his being cursed by the Ring. He manages to retard the progress of the curse, they realize that this is a temporary fix, and, making a virtue of necessity, Snape is instructed to report the injury to Voldemort.

In return, he is warned not to get in Malfoy's way over the coming year, and is sent home with Pettigrew.



A digression: it was only, in the week of August 14–20, 2006 that it dawned on me that I had managed to lose track of the villain again. This is always a mistake. In this case the oversight had deflected me from recognizing what, at first glance, appeared to be the probable event that drove just about the

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whole action of the ensuing book!

And even though my reading of the situation turns out to have been “canonically” wrong, the possibility still deserves some closer examination. Particularly since what we actually got in canon manages to flag it as yet another of Rowling's “missed opportunities.” I really do think that what I *thought* I'd figured out plays more soundly with the events as we were actually told them, than the after-the-fact explanation that Rowling eventually gave us.

First, my false epiphany:

Yes, and I agree, the conclusion really is all but unconceivable.

But, it really did suddenly seem to be boiling down to the likelihood that nobody — nobody *at all* — over the whole course of Year 5 — had told Voldemort about the loss of the Basilisk and the Diary!

Yes, I know. How could he NOT know?

But, I was all but certain that he didn't. From all of his behavior over the course of Year 5 it seems obvious, he just didn't. And his behavior, in canon, still contradicts Albus's later claim (in HBP) that he did.

Look at his actions and behavior, and — more to the point — look at *Lucius Malfoy's* actions and behavior over the course of OotP after Voldemort had already returned and was back in command. Does it seem even remotely plausible that Malfoy would have been walking about loose if Voldemort is supposed to have known that Lucius had managed to get his Diary taken out of the equation? Particularly now that we know what that Diary was?

Particularly when you stack that up against Voldemort's

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utter fury and his extraordinary level of determination to wipe the whole Malfoy line out, root and branch, by the opening chapters of HBP, allegedly over what was no more than a failure to retrieve a Prophecy record. Which by comparison was no more than a piddling nuisance. (Especially since I was sure that by the opening of HBP Tom had learned the contents of the full Prophecy *anyway*.)

I'm sorry, that fury is just *not* about Malfoy's failure to retrieve the Prophecy record. Bellatrix was also a part of that failure to retrieve the Prophecy record, and Tom is merely "not speaking" to *her*.

So what other explanation *could* there be?

It is all too easy for the reader to assume that whatever the Diary Revnant knew or learned is something that Voldemort knows or learned as well. But it isn't. There was never an open connection between the Diary Revnant and Vapormort.

Given how the matter of Lucius's actions were handled over the course of OotP, I suddenly realized that what must have happened was that once the term broke up and Snape reported for his debriefing, now that Lucius had been packed off to Azkaban Voldemort had demanded that Snape, in his character as a Malfoy family friend, fetch his Diary back. Tom hadn't entrusted it to *Narcissa*, after all. And Draco was just a kid. (Mind you, this doesn't play so well if Tom had already taken up residence in Lucius's house, but we were never told in canon that he had done so until the opening of DHs.)

Having to explain what had happened to it must have been the worst spot Snape had found himself in since having to explain to Albus why he hadn't prevented Fudge from summon-

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ing a Dementor, and kept Barty Crouch Jr from being Kissed before his testimony could become official the year before.

The resulting explosion did get reported to Albus. Albus tells us about it.

That's how Albus could say with such confidence that when Voldemort learned of the destruction of the Diary his anger was "terrible to behold." He had been given an eyewitness account. Indeed I wouldn't be astonished to learn that the discovery threw Voldemort into such a rage that the whole hideous 4 days that the Muggle PM and Fudge were mulling over in Chapter 1 were the direct result of a 4-day, Tom Riddle tantrum.

But who, in their right mind, would have dared to volunteer that information? Particularly if Tom wasn't asking for it? For that matter, who *could* have volunteered the information?

The student body was never told the details. They knew only that the monster had been killed, but not what kind of monster it had been — and Hermione had torn the page out of the library's copy of the book that referenced it. I don't think the students were ever told that one of their fellows had been *possessed* by Lord Voldemort either — and they certainly knew nothing about the Diary. So, wild tales from school wouldn't have seemed relevant enough for any DE daddies to be passing on. Particularly not tales from a couple of years earlier. Certainly not when their Master isn't *asking* about it.

The only adults present when Harry related his version of the story were Minerva, Albus, Molly and Arthur — and Lockhart who was completely out of it. (The conversation wasn't about *him* after all.) The rest of the Staff seems to have been filled in on the basics later, since Minerva was able to refer back to the

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matter at the end of HBP without feeling the need to give an explanation, but the Hogwarts staff was hardly going to run tattling to Voldemort. Nor were Harry and his friends. (Although it suddenly sounds like they all had a lucky escape in Year 5 when Ginny threw the subject in Harry's teeth during Christmas break. Tom must not have been listening in at the time.)

Which leaves Lucius himself. Fat chance of him volunteering it. Narcissa may have known something as well. Dobby did claim to have heard Lucius discussing the matter with somebody. But Narcissa, along with Bellatrix, does seem to think that the Dark Lord's rage is all due to the failure to retrieve the Prophecy record (or else she is putting on a fairly convincing act of believing it), so I doubt she has been approached regarding the matter herself. And Snape would have been ordered not to discuss it with her.

So Snape would have been forced to tap dance his way out of knowing about Lucius having deployed the Diary without "officially" knowing about the existence of the Diary itself.

If Voldemort had mentioned the Chamber of Secrets or the Basilisk, Snape would have had an opening and could have gone; "But Master, the school was under attack by a Basilisk some years ago. Potter killed it. There was something about a cursed book, but I was never able to discover the details." He can also honestly claim that he never actually saw the ruined Diary himself. Harry had given it back to Lucius before Albus could show it to Snape.

And... Peter Pettigrew.

Right. Him again.

The little man upon the stair, whom everyone forgets is there.

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Peter certainly *could* have told Tom about it. He has to have heard the story himself — probably when Ron and Harry filled Hermione in on what she had missed while petrified. After all, where else did Peter get the information that Voldemort was haunting a forest in Albania (which Harry had been told by Albus at the end of CoS)? And he could certainly back up Snape's story if anyone thought to ask him. But he was totally out of the loop where anything to do with the Horcruxes was concerned. And he was never one of the Dark Lord's lieutenants during the first war.

(ETA: um, well, it turns out, *not!* Peter had to have been *right there* when BabyMort created the Nagini Horcrux. He probably assisted as well. Dang! I think one of the stupidest things we've ever done was to take Sirius Black's unsupported word on *anything*. Particularly anything concerning the knowledge and accomplishments of Peter Pettigrew.)

And, besides, when you stop and consider it, Peter is a veritable black hole where it comes to information. You can never be altogether sure just what has found its way into his head, but none of it ever comes back out. Not unless harvesting that particular crop of information has been represented to him as his assignment. Anything beyond what he has already agreed to tell you has to be forced out of him. So, no, on reflection, I don't think that Peter would have told Lord Voldemort about what happened to his Diary. After all, if Peter waited long enough somebody *else* would do that. *And* take the heat for it.



Well, it turns out, that reasoning was apparently wrong.

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Because, according to Albus, Voldemort did get the story of the ruined Diary out of Lucius.

Say what?

And Voldemort let him *live*?

Which is just plain wrong, considering what we know of Tom Riddle. In the first place, if that's what happened, it had to have happened *before* the raid on the DoM.

In fact, in order for Albus to have been given an eyewitness report of it, it had to have taken place at a time that *Severus* could witness it. i.e., not at any point during the school year. As a Head of House Snape spends every Christmas and Easter break at the school and is only out and about during the summer

Which means the revelation had to have taken place all the way back before the previous school year commenced. A full year and a half earlier.

While Harry's connection to Voldemort was still wide open.

I mean, what are the odds that something like that could have gone off without Harry feeling a reaction?

Well, if you can just *about* make an argument that he did.

We never were given an explanation in canon for the scar attack Harry had the night before the kids all boarded the Hogwarts Express and left for Year 5. And that attack was a bad one. One of the worst of the attacks he ever caught from long distance. But there was no visual or auditory data accompanying it. And there was so little attention paid to it by the rest of the events in the story that it is hard to believe that it was truly relevant. Unless Rowling had intended to follow up on it, and the book got away from her and she forgot all about it. By this time it all reads like a retcon.

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If you are mentally limber enough to do the kind of backbends required you can *sort of* invent some suggestions around the edges of OotP that Tom had intended to deploy the Diary over Year 5 himself, and raise some hell on Albus's turf at long-distance, without any personal risk. (In retrospect, I might have rather enjoyed watching Dolores try to deal with a Basilisk in the basement.)

But it sure makes a lot more sense that Tom would have wanted that Diary in his hand and ready to deploy the minute that he turned his attention from killing Potter to removing Dumbledore. I suspect the Diary was always intended as a device for removing Dumbledore. Lucius had been told at least that much when he was given it. That's why *Lucius* used it.

After the Prophecy record debacle Tom would have probably given it to Draco and ordered him to write in it.

Or, in short: in another universe, we could have just been handed yet another Book 6 = Book 2 parallel. The entire central issue of the book appeared to have been precipitated by Lucius Malfoy having deployed the Riddle Diary without permission.

But no. Albus says (two years after Rowling had written OotP — which if what she claims is true, she hadn't reread) that Tom got the story of the loss of the Diary out of Lucius himself. So we have to invent reasons for why Tom was suddenly acting so far out of character as to let him get away with it.



Of course, in HBP Albus also tries to tell us that Tom had used Nagini to murder Frank Bryce as well. And that we already **knew** that to be completely wrong, because we had **watched**

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Tom kill Frank Bryce himself, with an AK, and it was no such thing. Had the curse in his hand been causing Albus to hallucinate?

The only possible excuse I can come up with to reconcile Albus's version regarding the Diary is that by the time Voldemort learned of its loss, he needed Malfoy for the sake of his connections to Fudge too much to be able to give him the punishment he deserved. And it makes you finally wonder whether when Malfoy saw the DoM mission going pear-shaped he didn't opt out and get himself captured on purpose.

But I still think my first interpretation, that the whole business only surfaced after Lucius had been locked up, would have given us a better explanation for the events that we were actually *told* about, which were reported to us at the opening of HBP.

And, frankly, by this time, to deliberately overlook Albus's statement that it was Lucius who told Tom the story of what happened to his Diary is embarrassingly easy, even if it didn't take place over the course of DHs. In fact, I'm sure Rowling has already completely forgotten that she ever wrote anything of the sort. And might even try to deny it.



So. Back to our scheduled program: Snape returns to Spinner's End lumbered with Pettigrew. Snape cannot help but smell some kind of a trap at this development. And for that matter he cannot help but know that Voldemort's wrath is about to descend upon the Malfoys. Which certainly explains how Snape could claim to know about Malfoy's assignment by the evening of the same day Malfoy was actually given it. Even if he wasn't there when Tom did it.



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With Pettigrew underfoot, communications between Snape and Albus must have been a bit strained. At the very least, Pettigrew would have recognized a Patronus Messenger for what it was, so they needed to be sparing of any such communications.

But I think that the development of Malfoy's probable assignment was important enough that Snape managed somehow to get the message out.



By the time Scrimgeour was having his interview with the PM — with whom he spoke a couple of days after his altercation with Dumbledore — Dumbledore had already dealt with the Ring, which I suspect he had almost certainly located earlier, but left in place in case Voldemort decided to check on it after his return. Dumbledore may also have intended to more closely examine the Locket from #12, and only now discovered that it had been discarded on Sirius Black's authority.

Alternately, it is quite possible that the discovery that the Locket had gone walkabout is what prompted him to finally deal with the Ring — before it also wandered off to parts unknown. And, not being Kreacher's master, Kreacher was able to stone-wall any questions to the point that Albus (wrongly) concluded that he knew nothing more about the matter.

Like I say, my respect for Albus's skills in interrogation is not as high as he would have liked. We've really only seen him succeed with people who are convinced that they *ought* to tell him something.

Or drugged, and even then he seems unable to get any information that can be *used* for anything.



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In any case: Dumbledore makes his raid on the Ring, and allegedly is gravely injured. He manages to return to Hogwarts and to summon Snape. Even if Peter (or Tom!) saw Albus's Patronus at that point, the summons was nothing that couldn't be explained by Snape's function as a spy.

Snape responds to the summons, manages to save Dumbledore's life *then* — assuming there really was a deadly curse on the Ring. If we are dealing with falsified information, we need to keep in mind the possibility of intentional misdirection on the part of the conspirators. But it seems most likely that the Ring was indeed cursed, and badly.

However, if there was no conspiracy to stage a murder before this date, this is probably the point at which the issue came up. They had to adjust their plans for the upcoming year in consideration of the likelihood that Dumbledore was now on borrowed time. If Albus had only a year or so to live anyway, it is time to take some risks.

And in light of Voldemort's new demands, to ultimately give Tom exactly what he is asking for may be no longer all that much of a hardship. Albus has certainly more in the long run to gain from orchestrating his own murder than he has from peacefully dying in his own bed.

By the following day or two Snape had already been given some warning that he is being called off the ever-pending job of assassinating Dumbledore. Reassignment will certainly go to Draco Malfoy (who else, after all, is likely to be at the school and in a position to do it?). Snape definitely has to have been warned against interference at some point.

I fully contend that there *may* have been an earlier plan

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to fake Albus's death back in 1981 (I suspect that part of the reason that Snape was sent into Hogwarts in the first place was to assassinate Dumbledore on Voldemort's signal). If so, those plans are re-examined and revised. By the end of the academic year Albus will indeed be dead.

At this point, Snape also fills Albus in more thoroughly on the fact that he now has Pettigrew underfoot and expects some form of "test" to be thrown his way.

It is possible that Albus's plan to recall Slughorn and finally give Snape the DADA position is also discussed at this point, but Albus may have made that decision on his own and not told Snape about it until after he had Slughorn's agreement. Or that may have been a further development after the Unbreakable Vow was put in play. Snape certainly gives every *appearance* of being unaware of such a plan the evening the Black sisters showed up on his doorstep. Although that in itself is hardly conclusive evidence of anything. He's a very good actor.

In any case, Snape returns to Spinner's End to await developments.

When Narcissa turns up on his doorstep, perhaps as soon as the following evening, Snape knows that the assassination of Albus Dumbledore has indeed been reassigned. He also realizes that Narcissa's visit explains Pettigrew's presence in his house.

It should be noted that in the course of this visit the news of Dumbledore's injury is also deliberately fed to Narcissa, Bellatrix and the DEs, having already been reported to Tom. It is later put on public display at the Start-of-Term feast as well. Snape & Albus clearly *want* the DEs (and everyone else) to believe that Albus has been weakened.

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Before we get any further ahead of ourselves, however:

We need to take a step back at this point and reconsider a few peripheral details (and alternate possibilities) which we have been taking a bit too much for granted, and which are fundamental to whatever the motivation underpinning Albus's whole production was.

We also need to take a second look at one of those contributing factors which is routinely brought up whenever we postulate that Albus's death was both genuine, and voluntary.

Namely, the blasted hand. I am going to have to admit that I was not at all satisfied regarding that blasted hand. Albus never gave us a satisfactory answer regarding what happened to his hand, and the explanation that he finally did give us was all too much in keeping with some of his other "likely stories"

Plus, for all that it must have looked terrible, after the first evening we saw it, we never really got the feeling that he had a problem with *using* that hand. It was his *wand* hand, for heaven's sake! If he had blasted it beyond recovery, you would think that it might have slowed him down at least a *little*. Instead, apart from one comment to Harry in Chapter 3 that it was "a little fragile," and some clumsiness opening a bottle the same evening, the injury didn't seem to inconvenience him at all. And back in Chapter 3 the injury would have still been quite recent.

I do still tend to think that it is more likely than not that he did have a curse blow up in his face when he destroyed (or took hold of) the Ring (or lifted the jinx on the DADA post) than that he injured his own hand on purpose — although given the way

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that once an element has been used in the series it generally gets used again, we can't automatically dismiss the possibility. Pettigrew certainly injured *his* wand hand on purpose (*twice*).

IF the injury was sustained acquiring or destroying a Horcrux, Albus may even have come very close to dying from it at the time. And it may very well have only been Snape's timely intervention which saved his life at that juncture. But I am not altogether convinced that those injuries were as debilitating as they appeared.

And he certainly seems to have intended that the news of his "disabling injury" be circulated within the DE circles as quickly and as widely as possible.

In retrospect, IF we are dealing with a staged death here, and a build-up of several months of intermittent acting, by the start of the school term, the blasted hand may have been suffering from not much more than purely cosmetic damage. It may, in fact, have been a piece of "performance art."

Yes, in other words, let's skitter off to the sidelines for a couple of paragraphs here and examine another rather far-fetched possibility. I've finally come around to admitting that some variant of the mouldy old "Stoppered Death" theory which has been floating around the fandom since HBP came out may well *be* in play here.

At this point the basics of that particular theory seems to fit all of the requirements. And Albus's tower statement of; "Well, I certainly did have a drink... and I came back... after a fashion," is an anvil-sized hint that Rowling has at least pretended to have just handed us a clue to *something*. Although we can't be altogether certain just what.

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Not that the Stoppered Death theory itself is required. The whole matter could be exactly what it claims to be, just unconvincingly handled. The whole series was in the process of actively unraveling by this point. But theories are fun, so let's play with this one for a moment. I won't take long. I promise.

If the death was staged, Albus was in control of the timing.

I am inclined to think that Albus was well aware that he was actively in the process of dying before he left the castle with Harry that last evening. And, consequently, he personally had nothing much to lose. For that matter, I am inclined to think that by that evening he had already arranged everything that he possibly could about the timing of his exit. And that his time was now actively running out.

To that point, his death *had* been "stoppered."

It wasn't any longer.

But it wasn't Snape who had stoppered it.

It was his late partner, Nicholas Flamel.



At the end of PS/SS we were told that Flamel and his wife had enough of the Elixir of Life stored to put their affairs in order before they died, and Rowling stated in one of her interviews a few years later that the Flamels are dead now. But c'mon, they'd been without the Stone since the previous summer, when they agreed to let Albus use it for bait. How often do you need to take the stuff?

They must have made sure to have had a considerable stock of the stuff put away before they turned the Stone over to Albus. And at that, there was always the risk that Voldemort

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would somehow manage to steal it. So they couldn't have been absolutely certain of getting it back.

I also think that the Flamels must have done a lot of thinking and discussing the matter between themselves over the year that the Stone was at Hogwarts.

I think that perhaps they ultimately came to the conclusion that their lives had devolved into a matter of habit, and that perhaps two-thirds of a millennium was quite long enough for anybody. I think their affairs were already in order when Albus finally went to beg them to permit it to be destroyed. And it may have been the Flamels themselves who were the ones to suggest that particular solution to the problem.

And, if that is the case, they probably wouldn't greedily hang around to polish off their final batch of Elixir, to the very last drop. They stopped taking it themselves, and left the remainder to Albus, in their will, to be used as emergency "insurance."

If Albus was being straight with us about the curse on that Ring, then Snape slowed the progress of the curse long enough (as he did later, with Katie Bell) to keep Albus alive until he could take his first dose of the Elixir.

Rowling even **makes a point** of bringing the subject of the Elixir of Life back up in this very book and having Albus explain how it works and what the disadvantages of using it are. The connection is just sitting there waiting to be made.

But no one seems to have done so until Rowling assured us that Albus was dead.

Of course I also really do tend to think that the fans may be making rather more of the phrase "stoppered death" than the canon reference really warrants.

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After all, Snape is not the kind of blowhard who has a track record of making empty boasts.

If he tells his First years that he can *teach* them to “put a stopper in death,” then it stands to reason that something which conforms to this description is a part of the standard Hogwarts curriculum. Even if only once they get to NEWT-level (“— *if* you aren’t as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.”)

Brewing fame and bottling glory are descriptions that can probably also be stretched to apply to some of the more advanced potions taught at Hogwarts as well. Again, we only seem to have gotten a glimmer of that sort of thing once we reached NEWT-level. But then I think that teaching teenagers the art and science of brewing fame and bottling glory would be right up Slughorn’s alley, too. Every bit as much as Snape’s. More so, even.

So what puts a stopper in death?

Well, what is one of the *first* things that 6th year potions students find themselves learning to brew?

Antidotes.

We didn’t come up against much of anything like antidotes in the lower grades. Or, at any rate, we never came up against antidotes with the kind of complexity that Golpalott’s law entails. And I suspect that what “putting a stopper in death” refers to is exactly this specific skill.

So the truly ornate fan theories regarding “stoppered death” (and some of them get *very* baroque) are probably superfluous to the requirements of Rowling’s story. The concept still looks pretty sound, but the details need a lot of scaling back.

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Albus’s behavior, and his statements over the course of Book 6 were a perpetual reminder to everyone of his own mortality, and I have finally settled into the camp which is convinced that his death may well have been “stoppered” by some means, at least temporarily. And that he *knew* that it was temporary.

Which makes any theorizing over the staging of his actual death rather simpler upon the whole. It also makes the whole issue of the timing of events over the year a lot less random, since it was all more directly under Albus’s control. In fact, the timing of the big event was *entirely* under Albus’s control.

Yes. HIS control. Entirely. Or at any rate there are enough links (or potential links) in place to read it that way. Just watch:



By that point in the series, 6 books into a series of 7, any serious theorists were pretty much obligated to cut their cloak to fit the cloth, and to strictly work with what Rowling had given us over the course of the series. At 3300 pages that ought to be no hardship.

Even the certainty that she had deliberately held back at least a few crucial pieces of information for Book 7 was no longer sufficient justification to theorize magic that had not already been explained, or at least introduced to us in passing.

There are a limited number of methods of forestalling death that had been brought up and explained to us in the series to date:

There was the drinking of unicorn blood, which will preserve the life of the body at the cost of harm to an innocent, and which carries the price of cursing the life so saved ever after. I

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think we can all agree that Dumbledore would have found this an unacceptable option.

There is the creation of a Horcrux, which prevents true death, even though it does not necessarily preserve the body itself. It does this at the cost of the death of another person and the mutilation of one's immortal soul. Dumbledore would have found this option even less acceptable.

And, finally, there is the Elixir of Life, produced with the aid of the Philosopher's Stone which will extend one's physical life and well-being indefinitely, for as long as you continue to drink it. The cost here is the monumental effort of acquiring the wealth of knowledge, and the purification of spirit which one must undergo in order to create the Philosopher's Stone from which the Elixir is generated, and moreover a dependency upon the Elixir itself once one begins to drink it. For once you start to do so, when you stop, you die. Of the three methods, this is the only one which Albus is at all likely to have considered acceptable for delaying his own impending death.

Which, even if the Stoppered Death theory is irrelevant, strongly implies that he and Snape did deliberately plan for Snape to be the one to actually kill him. The Unbreakable Vow was almost certainly an intrinsic component of their plan. Snape *had* to be the one to kill him, and Snape had to have a *reason* to kill him, a reason that was *known*. Snape led Narcissa to demand it, but he would have done it anyway. The Plan required that Albus be *murdered*, before witnesses.

But you cannot time the failure of something like the Elixir (or the progress of a curse) to the minute. Whoever killed Albus had to be prepared to cover the possibility that their timing

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might be off, and he might die too soon.

It also means that even though Albus could not time his demise to the exact hour of the exact day, from the beginning of the previous July Albus had had a ballpark figure of about how much time he had left.

And he messed with Draco's mission to ensure that the attempt would take place on his signal, and not one minute before.

Oh.

Yes.

He also was aware that facilitating an invasion was part of Malfoy's assignment.



The next major item to crop up in our chronology is Malfoy being assigned his mission. And this particular item requires yet another considerable digression. Please forgive the delay; we will be working our way back around to Snape and his part in the matter, eventually. (I know that's all some of you are really interested in.)

Snape was clearly not present when the assignment was given to Malfoy. For that matter we do not know for certain whether Narcissa was present at that assignment, either. If Tom had not already taken up residence at the Manor, Draco might have been privately escorted to the Dark Lord by his aunt Bellatrix, and boasted of it to his mother afterward. Voldemort was bound to be in hiding somewhere. His "striking" appearance must have limited his movements considerably. Furthermore, young Malfoy cannot legally Apparate on his own yet, and at

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the start of his 6th year, probably doesn't even know how.

It is, of course, also possible that Voldemort was already settled in at Malfoy Manor itself throughout Year 6. He certainly was there by the summer following. Nor at that point did we know for certain whether Narcissa was officially a Death Eater herself, or whether she was only a supporter and the wife of a Death Eater.

Indeed, we've all the more reason to believe that Tom had moved in with the Malfoys as soon as Lucius was off the board in order to keep a closer eye on them in case either of them decided to bolt. Besides, Malfoy Manor was also probably the grandest of any of his followers' holdings. He would have considered it his due.

Rowling claims that Narcissa was not a DE herself. But of course she didn't tell us this in the books.

Which raises the question of whether Draco, himself, was officially a Death Eater by the opening of HBP.

I agree that it is certainly possible that Voldemort made an exception in Malfoy's case. The whole business of Malfoy and his mission is exceptional. But Harry has a tendency to see Death Eaters under the bed whenever he is dealing with people he dislikes. And I'm not sure we can take Harry's reading of the matter at face value.

My own suspicion is that over the course of HBP Malfoy was not officially a Death Eater yet, and at the time I speculated that Tom didn't ever intend that he ever be forced into/given the opportunity to become one. Voldemort understands the uses of carrots as well as sticks. And, besides; why should he go to the trouble of marking a kid, when a mark would make it

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easier to expose him and see him safely off to Azkaban with his father before he managed to get anything accomplished?

Voldemort also expected the kid to fail. Indeed I think he *intended* for the kid to fail. In fact, I suspect he set it up so that it would be widely believed by everyone connected with the DEs that he *had* failed. So why mark him? The mark is a summoning device. This kid hasn't learned to Apparate yet. And he won't be old enough to get an Apparition license until next June. If Voldemort has anything to say in the matter Malfoy isn't going to live long enough to get an Apparition license. Why does he need to be marked?

Even the fabled "Dark mark-reading barrier" that the DEs allegedly put on the staircase to the top of the Astronomy Tower during the battle in the corridor is an inconclusive piece of speculation. Indeed, it appears to be no more than yet another of Harry Potter's unsupported flights of fancy. Malfoy got to the top of the stairs before any barrier went up, and it had allegedly already been demolished by a stray curse before Snape hustled everyone back down that staircase.

(And, for the record, I think the "received interpretation" of that barrier on the staircase — i.e., Harry's interpretation — is total crackfic and a complete red herring, and that what was going on regarding the staircase was something else entirely. I'll come around to that later, too.)

No; I think that the whole mission was presented to Malfoy as his initiation assignment. IF he pulled it off, Voldemort would induct him into the circle a year early. Malfoy no doubt felt he was being honored..

Of course, if he failed, he, and his mother, would be killed.

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Which raises the related question of just what Malfoy was showing Borgin in order to get his cooperation over the matter of the cabinets. Frankly, I do not think he was flashing a Dark mark. (And I *certainly* do not think he was flashing a werewolf bite.) This, after all, was probably *Harry's* assumption.

We have a couple of much better possibilities, after all. For one thing, at this end of the story, it is obvious that his business with Borgin was specifically to do with the lacquer cabinet. A missive from a former sales associate formerly named Tom Riddle regarding that cabinet, might certainly do it. Tom has long-standing connections with Borgin & Burkes. And he has reached a position where you simply *do not* refuse his requests. Regardless of whether or not you are a Death Eater (which we do not know about Borgin). It's just so very *bad* for business. To say nothing of your health.



A far more valuable line of inquiry, however, concerns that set of lacquer cabinets, themselves.

They are a "paired set."

One of them is at Hogwarts.

It has evidently been there for quite some time. In fact, it was presumably undamaged and still fully operable until Harry's 2nd year, when Peeves smashed it at Nearly-Headless Nick's prompting in order to get Harry out of a detention.

The other is in a shop in London.

Once we had the Black Family tapestry sketch to work with, what I rather suspected was that those cabinets may have originally been Headmaster Phineas Nigellus Black's emergency

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route home to Grimmauld Place.

Phineas's daughter Belvina married a Herbert Burke. Caractacus Burke, the founder of Borgin & Burkes might have been her father-in-law, brother-in-law, or some other reasonably close relative. I thought that after her father died (and probably her Aunt Elladora as well), Belvina laid a claim on the London cabinet and her brother Sirius, now head of the family, let her take it.

That does make a viable extrapolation of how that particular apple got into its Knockturn Alley dumpling. But it's only one possibility. All we can say for certain is that the Hogwarts cabinet was almost certain to have been brought into the castle by a former member of the staff.

Any former member of the staff. At any time in the last couple of centuries. It need not have been Phineus Nigellus Black.

Another thing we do not know is just when the London cabinet got into the shop.

The Black family tapestry sketch claims that Belvina lived until 1962. Since very little depends upon that date, and there is nothing to contradict it, we may as well accept that at face value. We didn't get into the shop when Caractacus Burke was interviewed regarding the Slytherin locket. (Probably at some point between 1945 and 1950.) But that isn't necessarily to say it wasn't already there. It certainly could have been.

1962 is well after the period that Tom Riddle worked there. He may have not even returned from his first long exile in Albania by that time. He may have never known about the cabinet or its abilities, and there is no way that he could have learned about them if no one ever thought to volunteer that information.

(Had he known of it, don't you suppose he would have used

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it? Hold that thought.)

However; Phineus died in 1926, and his sister Ellidora in 1931. There is adequate time for Belvina to have acquired the London cabinet by the time Tom Riddle was handed his Hogwarts letter in 1938.

And if the original owner of those cabinets was *not* Headmaster Black, we have an open field of possible times that it might have ended up in B&B. It could have landed there at any point after Burke founded the business. Late in the 19th century.

And, apparently those cabinets had not been in use for decades, or you would think that either Dippet or Dumbledore (or Headmaster Black) might have done something about such a potential security breach.



On this head, the actual risk to Hogwarts security was probably not quite as great as it at first appears. The cabinets, when operating properly, almost certainly require a specific spell to activate the transfer (enabling it to serve as storage or a display case when not needed for transportation).

Indeed, Harry had climbed right into the London cabinet back in CoS to hide from the Malfoys and all but completely closed the door, and nothing whatsoever happened. Not a twitch.

At that point, the Hogwarts cabinet was still intact and the two were fully operational. The Hogwarts cabinet wasn't smashed until later that year.

Ergo: just stepping into the cabinet isn't going to activate the transfer, if the two cabinets are operating correctly.

Which opens up two lines of speculation. One; in which Tom

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Riddle was not aware of the properties of the two cabinets, and another in which he was.

The reading that he was aware of them has a fair degree of influence upon any attempt to keep track of Tom's Horcruxes. The reading that he wasn't gives Malfoy a slight advantage towards getting to the end of his 6th year alive.

After the Hogwarts cabinet was smashed, someone put it back together physically, but no one repaired the charms. Consequently the two cabinets were no longer communicating with each other properly, and it appears that the damaged one was likely to engage the transfer function at random. Causing things to disappear and reappear at some undetermined time later.

It was already widely known to be a "vanishing cabinet." Which is why the twins stuffed Montegue into it. In hopes that he would vanish. He did.

(ETA: Frankly, I'd call that attempted manslaughter at the very least, myself.)

However; let's take a 2nd look at this issue. Even at the time that it was smashed, back in CoS, it was *already* known and identified as a "vanishing cabinet." i.e., it was already understood to be a potential hole in Hogwarts's security wards. The very fact that Montegue had somehow managed to *Apparate* from the cabinet, back into Hogwarts, when you cannot DO that, is a gigantic hint of just how much of a security hole that cabinet represented. And yet, apparently it had been left out on display in a public area for decades, or at any rate, somewhere public enough that Peeves could get to it and make a show of smashing it. Or the Weasleys stuff an enemy into it.

Montegue claimed that he could sometimes hear conversa-

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tions from the shop, but was unable to make himself heard by anyone there. So the two cabinets were really not communicating with one another at all.

But I suspect that back when things had been working properly, you had probably needed an activation password or incantation to make the transfer engage. Which is why Dumbledore (and Dippet, and possibly Headmaster Black) could leave the Hogwarts cabinet out in a public area for decades without taking any further security measures. No one had the activation password.

Except, possibly, a few members of the Black family, if it *had* once belonged to the Black family. Who had forgotten, or not realized that those cabinets had originally been theirs, or that one of the cabinets was now in a shop in Knockturn Alley.

Or Caractacus Burke had acquired whatever provenance was forthcoming for the London cabinet, from whenever it was that he acquired it. If so, that info might be in the shop records.

I think that's what Draco was waving under Borgin's nose. He had somehow got hold of the activation phrase. And he was using that to strong-arm Borgin into helping him fix the Hogwarts cabinet. The likelihood of this reading applies regardless of whether Draco had managed to discover this through private family resources, or whether Tom had given him the information and told him to make use of it.

Until that point Borgin (who seems to have taken over the business from Burke) possibly hadn't known the other cabinet was at Hogwarts, or that it was damaged. Unless he was fully conversant with all of the shop records, he may not even have known that he had one of a pair of highly valuable magical

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transfer cabinets just sitting right there in the shop. If Caractacus Burke was just Belvina's brother-in-law, he may have not ever had the password himself. And Borgin, learning that the other half of the pair was damaged, and that he was flirting with trouble from the Ministry for displaying a trip to nowhere in his showroom, might have been convinced that it really was in his own best interests to comply with the kid's demands.

And then the kid dragged Greyback into the equation as well, for good measure.

My contention originally was that Tom didn't know about the cabinets, and those cabinets had probably figured in some Black family anecdotes, which Draco may have learned about as a small child. Either from his mother, or even the former head of the Black family, his great-uncle/distant cousin, old Arcturus Black, who was still alive until the year that Draco started Hogwarts, and Arcturus was certainly old enough to have remembered his own grandfather Phineas Nigellus and his vanishing cabinets. Admittedly, this is assuming that Arcturus Black remained in contact with any of his cousin Pollux's descendants which is far from certain. But, in any case, under this reading, Malfoy manifestly already knew something about such paired cabinets when he heard Montague's story. That's why Montague's story rang a bell for him in the first place.

And either Narcissa, or Aunt Bellatrix, was able to confirm that yes, there was a family story of great-great(-great)-grandfather Phineas Nigellus having once had a pair of such cabinets when he was Headmaster of Hogwarts.

However, this does *not* explain how Malfoy knew the other cabinet was at Borgin & Burke. Nor, if it was a family item,

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how the family had managed to lose track of it.

No, it really does sound more and more as if it was Tom who instructed Malfoy to repair and use the cabinet.

The very fact that Malfoy was visiting Borgin to secure his cooperation regarding the London cabinet well before the school year started is strong indication that getting a group of Death Eaters into the castle was an intrinsic part of his mission. I also say that what he was showing Borgin to secure that cooperation was either something to invoke his Mother's family's claim on those cabinets, and to make it clear that he knew the secret of the cabinets' intended function, or something to detail the legal mess Borgin was flirting with if he tried to evade the issue by selling it. He was also clearly questioning Borgin about the damage the Hogwarts cabinet had sustained and asking for advice as to how to repair it. After all, neither cabinet is of value as anything more than furniture if they do not work as advertised. And mere furniture is not what B&B specializes in. Such cooperation is ultimately to Borgin's material benefit.



Which brings us to the agenda item in all of this that I have a real problem with: Namely, Voldemort's demand that Malfoy get a squad of DEs into the castle.

Why?

Yes, indeed. Why send a pack of outsiders into the castle? This demand was clearly a part of Draco's original orders, or he would hardly have been slipping off to Borgin to give instructions not to sell or move the London cabinet before the school year even started. Let alone asking him how to fix its counter-

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part. But what was the *point*?

If the mission was really a legitimate test of the kid's mettle, Voldemort would have told him to do the job entirely by himself and that if he ended up needing to make a run for it, to go to Snape who was already in place for assistance. Never mind bringing in outsiders. They'd only complicate things.

Instead, one of the major snags and delays of complying with the assignment was arranging for some way to get the outsiders *in*.

And I really don't think that they were sent in to "help" Draco. They really weren't all that much *help*, were they?

Draco could have gone up to the top of the tower to wait for Dumbledore's return after any of his periodic absences much more easily on his own. The Headmaster was not being particularly secretive about those absences, and he cultivated a predictable practice of returning to the castle by always flying in to the top of the Astronomy Tower — a known favorite haunt of the Slytherin House ghost. The Baron isn't nearly as chatty as Sir Nick, but that particular bit of information regarding Dumbledore's habits doesn't need to travel very far to be of assistance to Malfoy, does it?

(Note: Why does no one, Rowling included, remember that the Astronomy tower is a *classroom environment*, which holds its classes at *night*? Why are people always said to be trying to sneak off there after dark to snog, or "secrety" fly in and out on a broom during what would typically be a class period? Astronomy is a required class for years 1–5, and there would be NEWT classes for years 6 and 7. There would be a class on top of that tower *every night*. Possibly more than one per evening.)

Draco no doubt believed that the Death Eaters were sent

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as his back-up, and to cover his retreat. But if he had managed to lie in ambush and kill Dumbledore without witnesses he could have just gone back to the Slytherin dorm and if it later looked like there were suspicions flying, tried to slip out to Hogsmeade and used Rosemerta's Floo the next day. He knew about Snape's Unbreakable Vow to protect him by Christmas. Snape would have been obligated to cover his retreat — if a retreat was called for.

For that matter; just when over the entire preceding 5 books had Malfoy ever refused Snape's praise, support, or assistance? And if he was suddenly doing so now, doesn't that suggest that he has been given what looked to him as a compelling reason?

I'm not so convinced that we can take his brush-off of Snape's inquiries with his; "Leave me alone, I've got other help" at face value. If the squad of invaders had orders to keep Snape out of it unless he turned up on his own, then Draco probably had similar orders himself.

I began to suspect that the invasion component of that assignment was set up as a potential double-cross.

Malfoy — and all of the crew which was sent to "help" him were regarded by Tom as expendable.

The whole maneuver was a feint.

I think that, yes the DEs were probably sent to serve as witnesses to the success or failure of the mission. If they managed to get that far. But if they got that far, they were also expected to be prepared to finish off Dumbledore, and to execute Malfoy then and there, if he failed.

And, quite possibly, to execute him even if he had *not* failed. That crew were assigned by Voldemort himself. They were not

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sent by Malfoy's mother. Narcissa would never have sent Greyback. I don't even think that Bellatrix would have sent Greyback, unless she was told to. And you will notice that she was not sent herself.

That crew were not Voldemort's most loyal followers. They were not his most competent followers. They were his most vicious followers. With Greyback invited along (or, hanging around Borgin's and inviting himself along) just for the fun of it.

Voldemort *expected* Malfoy to fail. He *wanted* Malfoy to fail. It is not beyond what we know about the former Tom Riddle for him to have taken steps to ensure that it should be assumed by everyone that Malfoy *had* failed. And Tom would send that message back to torment Malfoy's father. This is another vote against the reading that Malfoy had already been formally inducted into the DEs when he was given that mission.

I think the way it was supposed to go, is that Malfoy's invasion would have been expected to have taken place much earlier in the year and that it would end in a shambles. He wasn't expected to get anywhere near Dumbledore. Malfoy himself would be killed in the cross-fire, his troops would make whatever escape they could. And then, some time later in the year, after the excitement died down, Snape would assassinate Albus, as originally intended. And I very much doubt that there would have been any requirements about facilitating invasions on Snape's part.



So why didn't it happen like that?

Well, what I think may have happened is that if Tom *didn't*

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know about the cabinets, Draco took his Dark Lord by surprise by turning out to be cleverer and much more resourceful than Tom had anticipated, and Tom, who wasn't expecting that, was intrigued.

In this scenario, Voldemort had probably expected Malfoy to bring his troops in through one of the tunnels to Hogsmeade (on the night of a full moon? Including a horde of werewolves from the forest?). That's the kind of plan that he would expect from a schoolboy. And since it was all going to fail anyway, it didn't matter to Tom that most of the tunnels were already known to the staff.

Instead, Malfoy went off and roped Borgin into the plot and was engaging in a correspondence with him in London. WTF? Although it is pretty clear that Malfoy did come under a certain degree of pressure over the continuing delay, I am beginning to suspect that the lack of any indication of displeasure from Voldemort over the progress of Malfoy's assignment may indicate that he was fascinated by the novelty, and wanted to see how it would all unfold, and just how far the kid would get with it.

And the plot all but worked. Indeed, it *had* worked. Draco may just have earned himself a reprieve.

But how was it that *Albus* learned about the planned invasion? For I am sure that he did know about it.



However, in the event that Tom *did* know about the cabinets (including the fact that the one in Hogwarts was damaged, and dangerous), we have a different line of reasoning to follow. For one thing, in this case, Malfoy had clearly been handed his

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tools and told how he was supposed to use them. For another, we have to account for Malfoy's other two murder attempts.

I'm beginning to suspect the other two attempts may be down to a matter of timing. Draco went off to Hogwarts with an assignment. He knew about the damaged transfer cabinet, and that he was supposed to fix it to enable Tom to bypass Hogwarts's security. It seems reasonably safe to suppose that Draco was told that this would enable him to bring in a crew to help him assassinate Dumbledore, for he certainly appears to believe this to be the case.

Well, repairing that cabinet (particularly if Albus was undoing the repairs every evening after Draco returned to his common room) was turning out to be a great deal more difficult than he'd anticipated. I don't think Draco handles frustration very well.

And we also know that he didn't purchase that cursed necklace at the same time that he was talking to Borgin about the cabinet, for Hermione noticed it in the display case when she went in immediately afterwards to ask questions. I suspect that Borgin will deal with familiar customers by owl, and he knows the Malfoys. By mid-October, with no discernible progress on the cabinet, Draco was probably beginning to panic. I suspect he may have talked himself into believing that if he managed to assassinate Dumbledore without help, he'd be forgiven for failing to repair the cabinet.

It is uncertain just when he managed to place Madam Rosemerta under Imperius. For that matter, neither do we know whether it is possible to transfer the control of an Imperiused puppet from the caster of the curse to a 3rd party. But it is clearly possible to curse someone and order them to follow

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whatever orders are given via a Protean charm. It may not matter who sends those orders through that Protean charm.

Draco wasn't certain that he would be able to get the such a heavily cursed item as the necklace into the castle, either. He probably had it sent to the owl post office in Hogsmeade to be picked up later. Or, given that Madam Rosemerta was under Imperius, he may have directed it to be sent to the Three Broomsticks. No one seems to have bothered to try to follow a paper trail about how the necklace got to Hogsmeade (or at least no one ever told Harry about any such investigation) so one has a reasonably free hand on extrapolating how that was accomplished.

Which means that Draco probably had Rosemerta retrieve the package, destroy the outer wrapper with his name on it, and then contact him. Whereupon he then hashed out an extemporaneous plan to get someone unconnected with himself to take it into the castle.

Given that he had Madam Rosemerta under his control the rest follows pretty much as described in canon. The attack that got Katie Bell took place in late October. The one that got Ron Weasley had been set up before Christmas, although it didn't actually come off until the following Spring. I think when nothing happened related to the poisoned mead attempt over the Christmas break, Draco gave up in despair and redoubled his efforts with the cabinet.



As to how Albus would have known about the matter; well we've got a couple of hot possibilities to consider:

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Harry's trip to Diagon Alley to get that year's school supplies took place the first week in August. And Harry was yattering on about Malfoy being "up to no good" from that point forward. Even though he didn't speak up to an adult about the matter until he was practically stepping onto the Hogwarts Express, there was no secret about Harry's suspicions that Malfoy was up to something.

Albus had already tangled with whatever had blasted his hand. Snape had already helped him to "stopper" his death. By that time Albus also would have already been filled in on the fact that Snape has been ordered to stand down and let Malfoy have a go at assassinating him, and they had drafted out their staged murder plans for the year. Albus would have taken Harry's information regarding Malfoy very seriously indeed. Once he heard of it.

So our task is to fill in the gap on how he got the information. Because considering the number of parties involved in the matter, it is a bit much to assume that he never did. And he doesn't have to have got it immediately.

My favorite (although far from the only) candidate for this particular game of "telephone" is Fleur. She was actually living at the Burrow over that summer, and she isn't so much older than Harry that she would automatically dismiss his theories on the grounds that he is just a kid. Remember; she's seen Harry in action. And he did save her little sister. She would be inclined to take him seriously.

I suspect that she would have passed Harry's observations/suspicions of Malfoy on to Bill. Bill is far enough removed from his parents' household that he probably doesn't take Harry's

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observations for granted either.

He might very well have mentioned the matter to Moody, or Shackbolt, or Tonks, or somebody in the Order. From there it would have been relayed to Albus. A sure thing? Hardly. But plausible within fairly simple parameters.

At the very least, Arthur might have thought the matter over after seeing the kids off on the Hogwarts Express, and sent an owl to Dumbledore, just in case there might be something to Harry's fretting.

But those aren't our only plausible scripts.



On to somewhat shakier possibilities: we are approaching the realm of "extreme theories" with this one. This is the biggest gap in my current interpretations which lacks an established canon bridge.

What do we really know about Borgin & Burkes?

It appears to be a somewhat dodgy curiosity shop, perhaps one of the more reputable businesses in a highly unsavory district. And it's been in operation for at least the past 70 years, and probably longer. It specializes in Artifacts, Light or Dark, Cursed or otherwise, and it draws a customer base from a broad spectrum of wizarding society. All the way from very shady characters indeed, to serious collectors from prominent families.

So, given that kind of a customer base, can we really anticipate the proprietors' own political views? Apart from a tolerance for the Dark Arts, and Dark wizards, that is? I don't think we can. B&B have a vested interest in telling each and every

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customer exactly what the customer wants to hear. We've watched the current proprietor, Borgin, do precisely that. I wouldn't be surprised to discover that Riddle picked up his habit of pointing out faux connections/parallels between himself and whoever he is trying to influence while he was working there.

And, lest we forget, Tom Riddle was once employed in that very shop. Indeed, we do not know for certain just how far back Riddle's association with that shop goes. But we do know that he was a favored and highly valued associate at the time of his first disappearance — and that he grossly abused his employers' trust; murdering one of their prominent customers and absconding with at least two significant items from her collection. Admittedly the murder could not be proved, but he was tacitly revealed as a thief, even if only to a few eyes (assuming Albus didn't cover that up too, I wouldn't put it beyond him). And he undoubtedly knew many of his employers' business secrets.

This cannot have been a welcome or a comfortable discovery for the shop's owners.

At some point by around 1950 or thereabouts, Albus Dumbledore, almost certainly already a member of the Wizengamot, quite likely on the strength of an Order of Merlin for dealing with Grindelwald (although probably not yet Chief Warlock) shows up asking questions. We do not know what else they may have discussed.

And, no, for the record, I don't think he left *everything* to do with that investigation up to Moody. Moody gave him copies of the memory evidence, but I think Albus may have done a follow-up of his own once he was at liberty over the summer.

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It only belatedly occurred to me that B&B could hardly be expected to be enthusiastic supporters of Tom Riddle — in any of his identities — in the wake of such behaviour. Probably no more than Horace is. And that even before he became Headmaster, or Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Albus Dumbledore was an acknowledged force in the wizarding world to be reckoned with.

For that matter, a shop in Knockturn Alley, particularly one with such a broad customer base, might be a very desirable source of information concerning the activities of various... elements... in wizarding society. Even before the advent of “Lord Voldemort.” Particularly to a wizard like Dumbledore who might occasionally be called upon to look into things.

On the Wizengamot’s behalf, you understand.

And neither Caractacus Burke, nor Mr Borgin is any more shady a customer than, say, Mundungus Fletcher — who may have even served as some sort of go-between between the shop and Albus Dumbledore, much as Hagrid served as courier between the Dumbledore brothers at Hogwarts Castle and the Hog’s Head. Indeed B&B is certainly no more dicey a possible outpost for Albus’ informers than the Hog’s Head. It is quite comparable, in fact. And probably less disreputable.

Reputation, after all, is valuable in B&B’s line of business.

Albus may not have even needed Harry’s story in order to be on top of the Draco affair.



But, in the event that B&B was NOT already one of Albus’s sources, once Albus did learn of Harry’s suspicions he would

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have sent someone to Knockturn Alley to investigate. Indeed, he may have gone there himself to take another opportunity to flash his blasted hand about where the “right” people could be trusted to note it and carry tales.

And who should he or his agent discover in Knockturn Alley but Fenrir Greyback, tricked out in borrowed wizard’s robes loitering in the vicinity of the shop and making sure that Borgin sees him, in accordance with young Malfoy’s threats.

Is it really so much of a stretch to wonder whether Albus may have managed to get the story out of Borgin in return for a promise of protection?

And that even if not, he may have recognized that the lacquer cabinet in the shop was a match to the one at Hogwarts.

That Hogwarts cabinet, after all, had *just* figured in a very notable and disturbing incident before the start of the previous year’s summer term. If Snape is a White Hat, he would hardly have failed to fill Albus in on the matter of Montague’s disappearance and reappearance as soon as he could. Which had only been a matter of a handful of weeks earlier, once Dumbledore had returned to the school, mid-June. The information would have still been reasonably fresh in Albus’s mind by mid-August. Indeed he may have only just overseen the removal of the damaged cabinet to the “7th floor storage room” to get it out of the students’ way, himself.

After all, just because Harry and his friends said nothing about the twins having stuffed Montague into the cabinet, it really is a bit much to assume that Snape didn’t get something of the story out of the boy before he clammed up. Including the overheard conversations in the shop at the other end of the trip.

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Snape was the boy's Head of House, after all. We saw that he was called in as soon as Montegue reappeared, and Montegue would have understood that Snape was trying to assist him after his ordeal. There was ample reason for some degree of trust there. Not to mention Legilimency.

In fact it was probably Snape who was the one to advise Montegue not to spread the story around. Although it sounds like the kid found the story just too good to resist passing on to his housemates once he boarded the Hogwarts Express back into town.

All completely off Harry's radar, of course. Which, when you think about it, is all of a piece with everything else of significance that was going on over the course of OotP. And HBP as well.

And if the looks of the cabinet in the shop rang a bell, a brief stop by #12 to look at the tapestry would have confirmed that Phineas's daughter Belvina had married into the Burke family. And Phineas, when asked, might have already confirmed that the cabinets were paired. And if not Phineas, then whoever of the previous Hogwarts staff were responsible for its presence in the school could have spoken up.

The information pertaining to those cabinets was all accessible to Albus. Once he chose to investigate.

Furthermore, if the cabinet had not already been moved into the Room of Hidden Things by the time the students returned to the school in September, then Malfoy and his goons must have done it themselves, after curfew one night, in full sight of the Hogwarts art collection — since I very much doubt that leading Crabbe and Goyle by the hand, with them all lumbered with a full-sized cabinet (even with a weight-reduction charm on it) under the cover of Peruvian darkness powder, with the

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aid of the Hand of Glory would really have been on.

In fact Albus may even have quickly had the cabinet moved out of the Room and back to its original location just to see if Malfoy would take the bait.

And once the cabinet had been moved into the Room, well, there is a tapestry of trolls in tutus and a wizard attempting to teach them ballet prominently on display opposite the door, to serve as a sentry — and to overhear what the petitioners were asking of the Room as well, if they had no better sense than to ask for it aloud, even if under their breath.

Once it had been reported that Malfoy and the cabinet had taken up residence in the Room, all the cards were in Albus's hands. After any evening that Malfoy had been reported spending time in the Room, Albus would make a visit that night and undo what Malfoy had done, stringing the whole project out for as long as the Flamels' stash of Elixir lasted. And then after he had taken his final shot of it, he went and repaired the cabinet himself — all but a simple detail or two — and waited for Malfoy to enter the room again and discover it.

Once Malfoy was reported entering the room, Albus sent for Harry.



Malfoy was sent a hand-picked backup team that he would absolutely not have been able to fight off alone, or to escape, once the main objective of the mission was accomplished. If, as I say, they managed to get that far.

Somehow, in defiance of all common sense, nobody seems to have anticipated that they might run into defenders patrolling

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the halls, and that they would need to fight their way out of the castle. If they had, you would have thought that the invaders would have at least brought along their masks. Every one of the DEs went into that mission bare-faced, and none of them appear to have been Azkaban escapees. So they were all of them “outed.” I really do not know *what* Rowling thought she was doing with *that*.

[For that matter, after the graveyard muster at the end of GoF, when have we *ever* seen DEs running about in masks. I think the masks were no more than yet another “use once and discard” decorative element.]

But, at any rate, from where the DEs were coming from, Malfoy was toast.

However, Voldemort wasn't quite prepared to dispense with Snape as well. Or, at any rate, not just yet



Which brings us (at long last! I know that's what you've been waiting for) to the Unbreakable Vow.

I suspect that Voldemort wasn't a bit pleased about that Vow. But that we heard of no particular fallout regarding it suggests that it wasn't a major issue for him. Voldemort may have realized that he had not made himself sufficiently clear that Snape was not merely to stand down and leave the way clear for Malfoy, but that he was to stay out of the matter altogether. Tom certainly had not let Snape in on the fact that the mission was a planned double-cross.

Still, he wasn't altogether displeased to learn that his currently most-favored follower was committed enough to what

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he did know of his Master's objectives that he was willing to put his life on the line to see that those objectives were carried out. Even if that wasn't at all what his Master had intended for him to do.

Therefore, Snape had to be kept out of it, so he wouldn't be zapped by the 2nd clause of his inconvenient Vow. And Bellatrix, probably through innuendo, misrepresentation, and outright lies, made sure that Draco tried as hard as he possibly could to *keep* Snape out of it. If McGonagall (probably on Albus's instructions) hadn't sent Flitwick to alert Snape of the invasion the whole thing might have all gone pear-shaped. It almost did, anyway, thanks to the presence of Greyback.

I also think the DEs had their orders *not* to interfere with Snape, IF he turned up.

Snape was to be kept OUT of it. They were NOT to confide in him. They were NOT to contact him. But if he showed his face, they were to let him take charge. Regardless of whether the boy had completed his mission or not.

So. About that Unbreakable Vow:



The Unbreakable Vow is really not the biggest fly in this particular pot of ointment. The Vow only made it obligatory that Snape take the role of the villain who would be “seen” to have murdered Albus Dumbledore. And that bit of casting was already built into his and Albus's plan, and most probably into Riddle's as well.

If the murder was staged, *who else* among Albus's supporters is there that Albus would have been able to trust to *kill* him?

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Who else would Albus be confident had the nerve to do it, and to do it cleanly? In fact, the two of them had to do anything they could to ensure that the job *would* fall to Snape, and that the DEs would stand aside and let him *do* it

(ETA: especially with the frapping Elder Wand complication in the mix — even though I suspect that there was a lot less to the Elder wand complication than anybody realized).

No, from where I am standing, the big, black, buzzing bug is our not having any idea of *why* those gratuitously weird details about the actual murder itself were written into it. They don't appear to be necessary. They serve only to confuse. And at this point, and on that issue, I have no clear answers

But where the Vow itself is concerned; the more carefully you read the Spinner's End chapter the more convincing is the suggestion that rather than being tricked into swearing the Vow by Narcissa, it was Snape who led Narcissa into asking him to take that Vow. He was clearly leading that whole conversation, and playing both those women like hooked trout.

Well, we're back to the "see it once; see it again" trick. This is the old "where your loyalties lie" confrontation all over again. What is going on here is not just what is dancing about on the surface.

Admittedly, the whole chapter reads rather like a deliberate entrapment. But it isn't Snape who is being trapped. ("Won't you step into my parlor?" Said the cunning spider to the flies... Complete with a sting.)

But the underlying issue is probably quite a bit more complex than that. I suspect that Snape's throw-away line to the two sisters that Pettigrew "has taken to listening at doors," was not

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just a caution that their visit "might" be reported, but a back-handed taunt to Pettigrew that Snape knew perfectly well that Pettigrew *would* be listening, and that he was understood to be *expected* to report any conversation to Voldemort. It may even have been a hint to Pettigrew that Snape would be amplifying Pettigrew's report with one of his own, so he'd best not make any flights of fancy in that report. Snape certainly had no qualms about openly talking about that Vow to young Malfoy later on. There was clearly nothing secret about Snape's Vow in DE circles by Christmas.

But I suspect that the real attempted "entrapment" at Spinner's End was not on Snape's part. Neither was it primarily directed at him.

When Snape opened the door to the Black sisters, he recognized that this was the test he had been expecting ever since he found himself giving house room to Peter Pettigrew, of all people. Only *he* wasn't the one who was being tested.

And I really do think that forcing Peter to come out and show his face, and that little throw-away line to alert the sisters that Pettigrew would be listening wasn't there by accident, either. No, not at all. That was damage control.

I've suspected pretty much all along that once it entered the equation, Snape and Albus were depending on the news of that Vow getting back to the DEs through Bellatrix, and I rather think that they were depending upon Pettigrew reporting it to Voldemort as well. It doesn't do a lot of good to interpose yourself between the Dark Lord and his current target if he's going to fire off a shot and hit you my mistake. The only way for Snape to protect Draco by taking that Vow was to make

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sure that Voldemort *knew* he'd done it. Since the Dark Lord was counting on Snape to actually assassinate Dumbledore, he was going to have to remain alive to do it. Which meant that for as long as the Vow was in effect, Draco had to remain alive *too*. We heard Pettigrew go up the stairs after Snape zapped him. But the man is an *Animagus*. He could have stomped up the stairs, transformed, raced back down, and been listening to the whole conversation at a mouse hole.

Sneering at Peter and zapping him for good measure would have also put his back up. And what does a Gryffindor (or a Death Eater) do when you get his back up? Particularly a notably underhanded Gryff or DE? Besides, why would the Dark Lord have sent Pettigrew home with Snape if not to report Snape's contacts and conversations? The man's not going to stop doing it on Snape's say-so.

The warning that Pettigrew will be listening served to keep Narcissa from blurting out anything that could be construed as disloyal. Two of the three clauses of the Vow are directly related to the successful completion of the mission. The other was no more than a predictable request of a mother to watch over and protect her son. No hint of disloyalty in any of that.

Snape later even makes a point of directly telling Draco that he has sworn an Unbreakable Vow to Draco's mother. This was not accidental either. Snape was using the Vow to call attention to himself as the Second Murderer. And this was absolutely deliberate.

In the first place, it sent an unequivocal message to the Death Eaters as to whose side Snape was on. They may have disliked him, been jealous of him, and tried to keep him out of it. But he

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was a rival, not an enemy. They were all (apart from Bellatrix) confident that he was on their side. This is not a minor issue. And it was expected to pay dividends later on.

In the second place, being solidly cast in the role of Second Murderer might lower the chance of someone like the Carrows or "Brutal-face" jumping in and queering the deal by trying to finish off Albus — who has spent a year establishing that he is vulnerable and helpless — themselves, if/when it became clear that Draco couldn't do it.

No one at the time really took Greyback into account (Rowling's throwing his name into the discussion I suspect was an afterthought and a retrofit). I tend to doubt that it had occurred to either Snape or Albus that anyone would be sending the Big Bad Wolf on a mission into a school full of their own children. Snape got up to the tower just about in the nick of time.

In the third place, it set the DEs up to see what they expected to see. They expected to see "Snape the Assassin" and that is exactly what they did see. Even if there were anomalies in his performance (and there were), these will probably not have registered. From where the DEs were standing, Snape was already cast as the murderer of Albus Dumbledore before he ever got to the top of the tower.

I also suspect that Snape and Dumbledore had agreed that, if at all possible, Snape should try to insinuate himself into Malfoy's plans in order to try to apply damage control from the inside.

Well, *that* certainly didn't work.



Malfoy managed to make a hash of that part of their plan.

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I'd say that he did it without half trying, but it's clear that he *was* trying, and trying very hard indeed. If he'd cooperated with Snape, rather than with Bellatrix, he might have agreed to fake his death and gone into hiding, earlier in the year, taking him out of the equation altogether, and no-one would have been any wiser.

Well, that's assuming that Tom wasn't already parked at Malfoy Manor. There's no way Draco would have agreed to go into hiding unless someone saved his mother. With the Vow in play they would have arranged some plausible reason lying about for why Snape could not have assisted Malfoy, and so appear to have managed to escape being zapped by the backlash. But, it just didn't happen like that.

Even though the Vow must have been an inconvenient and intractable element to have to juggle over the year leading up to the final performance, it was not there by accident, and Snape was not tricked into making it. He volunteered. We saw him do it, and even if it was a spur-of-the-moment improvisation Dumbledore no doubt agreed that he hadn't really any other choice, considering that there were two additional lives at stake.

(ETA: or at least so we could still think at the end of HBP. It is now clear that we really ought to have taken Albus at his word in the final debriefing the year before. He really *didn't* care how many other people were taken down along the way so long as his investment in Harry Potter was protected.)

And, once the Vow was in play, the two of them could certainly turn it to their own use. I have come round to the view that even if it wasn't their original idea (and I really do think it was), the Vow rapidly became an intrinsic part of their staging

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of the whole event.

And awkward as it might have been to maneuver around, it really looks like they managed to gain a great deal more by the use of that Vow than they lost by it. If Malfoy had just been a bit more cooperative, or the circumstances at the Manor been otherwise, there would have been everything to gain.

Providing yet another indication that including a Malfoy in your plans is just asking for trouble. (Molly: "That whole family is trouble!") Or, given Professor_Mum's views on the matter, maybe that should be rephrased as the inherent problems of depending on any member of the extended Black family in any complex operation.

And, at that, it may not have been that awkward, really. An Unbreakable Vow is not a piece of obscure Dark magic that nobody knows anything about. If a pair of country-bred, home-schooled, geographically and socially isolated 7-year-olds know what an Unbreakable Vow is and how to set one up, it can't exactly be considered *obscure*. It is probably some creakingly obsolete bit of contractual magic that turns up regularly in wizarding folktales (such as Beedle the Bard, although it doesn't make an appearance in the pared-down version of Beedle we got for Christmas that one year). And it has probably been superseded in everyday use by something far more manageable and effective in modern wizarding business practices where any form of contractual magic is still required. Although some very old traditional contracts probably still draw on it.

Indeed, when you stop and consider it, the Unbreakable Vow bears a more than slight family resemblance to the "magical contract" to compete, imposed by the Goblet of Fire, which

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locked Harry into the TriWizard Tournament back in Year 4.



While we're on the subject; this calls for some level of a reality check.

The TriWizard Tournament hadn't even been held for over 200 years. Any magic that was tied up in the tournament's administration is bound to be highly traditional.

Watching out for and protecting young Malfoy is something Snape would have done as a matter of course, and it was imperative that if anyone was going to throw an AK at Albus, it had bloody well better be Snape!

But I doubt that any of this has anything to do with the primary reason that Snape was all but openly suggesting that Narcissa demand for him to swear her an Unbreakable Vow.

Snape really has been associated with the Malfoys for a long time. From anyone's point of view, he has *benefited* from the association. And, nasty piece of work though he may sometimes seem, rank ingratitude does not really appear to be one of his failings. He has known the Malfoys long enough for it to be expected of him to have some genuine concern for their welfare. Which is why Narcissa went running to him in the first place.

And why Pettigrew was already there waiting for her.

Narcissa had figured out the double-cross.

That "double-cross" theory is another one right up there with Snape-loved-Lily. Once it finally occurs to you, it colors everything and you just cannot look away from it. Unlike Snape-loved-Lily, the double-cross has a high degree of canon support.



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The very fact that whoever sent the DEs into Hogwarts chose such a group and included Greyback suggests that whatever his objective was, it wasn't just to ensure that Dumbledore died.

And if Narcissa had figured it out, that would also explain the level of her agitation and hysteria, which otherwise comes across as over-the-top and even positively unbalanced. Bellatrix acts as if she is totally clueless, and she may well be. But the probability is that she just doesn't care. So far as she is concerned the kid is a Malfoy, not a Black. And whatever the Dark Lord wants is good enough for her.

But when you factor in the certainty of both Severus and Narcissa being aware of a double-cross in the making, the subtext of the dialogue between Narcissa and Snape in Spinner's End now comes across as something like:

"He's given Draco a mission that he cannot survive. My son is going to die!"

"Yes." (Subtext: got it — message received and understood.)

"You are his most valued advisor, his favorite —"

"I can't talk him out of it."

"But you could help Draco!"

"Yes." (MAKE me help him.)

And so the penny finally drops as to just why Pettigrew was sent to Spinner's End in advance. He wasn't sent there permanently, and he wasn't sent there just to report on Snape's movements. Voldemort knew perfectly well that if she figured it out, Narcissa would go running straight to Snape to beg for help. Snape has been associated with the Malfoys for yonks. Snape is sharp. Just sending Pettigrew home with him would be



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warning enough for Snape to know that he is supposed to back off and keep his nose clean. But Pettigrew's real assignment at Spinner's End was to spy on and report back regarding Narcissa.

Voldemort was just itching for an excuse to execute her too, and disloyalty is such a nice, wide, flexible reason to do it. Draco's assignment may even have been intended to serve as bait, goading her into saying or doing something damning in front of witnesses. That would have been another nice message that Tom hoped to be able to send to Lucius.

Bellatrix may have actually had an inkling of that much. She didn't give a damn about the Malfoys, father or son, but she *would* try to keep her own sister from saying or doing something that was calculated to get her killed.

It was a very close call, but they dodged that particular bullet. Between them, Snape and Narcissa managed to make an end run around the Dark Lord's plans for her, and to at least temporarily spare Draco's life. (Narcissa's life as well. Dumbledore could have made no objection.)

And, between them, Snape and Narcissa even lucked out and managed to make it sound rather as if Snape only swore the Vow at all because Bellatrix got up his nose and mocked him for not agreeing to swear it immediately! So Bella catches the blame for her excessive zeal.

Of course, the fact that the Vow came bundled with all sorts of value-added benefits for the "Murder of Albus Dumbledore" extravaganza was just so much gravy.

And I really doubted that the Vow was still even an issue by the end of the book. After all, if a vow needs a bonder, the bonder can release you from it. Tom would have seen to that.

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Which now brings us to the overheard quarrel. Frankly, during the interval between Book 6 and Book 7 I wasn't altogether satisfied on what that was all about, either. There were just too many possibilities.

I was certainly not convinced that Snape had gotten cold feet about the staged death itself. He may have had reasonable doubts regarding the performance, but they were both already committed to the plan and he would hardly ask Albus to go back to the drawing board and start over. Still, he might have been being shirty about some of the details. He could even have been quibbling about the need to stun whatever messenger (apart from Harry) might be sent to fetch him, or — more likely — over some other part of the advance prep work.

I do think that he hated the necessity of having to be the one to throw that AK. I could be wrong, and he may have been arguing that the murder itself wasn't really necessary. That if Albus was dying anyway, they probably could arrange for some kind of a finesse that would allow him to die in peace. If Albus was already dead, Snape probably wouldn't be zapped by the Vow's 3rd clause, and Malfoy might be given another chance.

If that was the case, Albus wasn't having any. If he was dying anyway, he wanted to *use* his death to buy them all something worth having.

But it's also possible that the quarrel may have been about some future action related to Snape's mission the following year, once he was in deep cover. Probably something to do with his supporting Potter from behind the scenes. Not everything

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we encounter in a given book is about what is going on the current book, after all. But if that was the case, it was a shoe that wouldn't fall until Book 7 was out.

Or; given that the quarrel took place very shortly before Ron Weasley managed to get poisoned by mistake, Snape might have been proposing to haul back on Malfoy's leash, or sit on him, rather than to continue to stand aside and let the kid make random murder attempts without interference, as previously agreed. (And wouldn't that have ended up in a fine display of; "Didn't I tell you so!" when Ron ended up in the hospital wing?)

Or they could have been arguing about the invasion. They couldn't really use the murder without the invasion, and its attendant witnesses. So was the benefit of the one worth the risk of the other? If they could just get Malfoy to renege on that part of the mission they could probably talk him into going into hiding, but they didn't have a viable handle to get at him to do it. And Snape couldn't really risk raising the subject himself.

It's very likely that this particular complication with Malfoy was giving Snape more and more cause for concern as the year went on. Because, while the first botched murder attempt (in fact both botched attempts) to curse or poison Dumbledore at long distance might have been initiated by Malfoy on his own, they knew that Malfoy was engaged in an invasion plan as well, and that he was claiming to have help from someone outside the school. Snape may have been worried that this wasn't just his mother and his aunt. Snape was being deliberately kept out of the loop. Which would have galled him. Snape likes knowing everyone's secrets.

He may even have been arguing over following Albus's lead and leaving poor Madam Rosemerta under the Imperius curse,

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so as not to tip Malfoy off that they were aware of his having her under his control.

Or he may have been objecting to being told to stay in his quarters until called, and have to run all the way from the dungeons to the top of the highest tower before he could intervene, and possibly arrive too late (and too out of breath) to perform his role. (Post-DHs we now know that he could have merely flown up the stairwell.)

Or — and this is something that surfaced on one of my discussion boards; Hagrid may have been mistaken over what Albus was talking about when he advised Snape to make investigations in his House. Hagrid is convinced that this was something related to all the House Heads being instructed to try to find out about who cursed Katie Bell. Snape and Albus already knew who was behind the attack on Katie Bell.

However, we also already know that Snape has a house of his own. How do we know for sure that Albus wasn't referring to the house in Spinner's End? And if he was, what might Snape have been engaged in at Spinner's End that he wanted to get clear of? Or what kind of tampering might Pettigrew have done while he was there?

There is just no shortage of possibilities about that quarrel.

But, I have to agree that the most straightforward answer to the problem was that Snape was beginning to balk over the murder being necessary at all, the invasion was too big of a risk, and he wanted off the hook of being the one to have to curse Albus, even if this defection risked his own life. And Albus, as usual, was convinced that he had everything under control, and flatly refused to permit Snape to risk his life in such a manner.

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But, otherwise I think I'm just going to have to pass on that overheard quarrel.



Or possibly not. Some additional considerations sluggishly surfaced in the last weeks before the release of the final book. That quarrel was overheard by Hagrid sometime in February. More than half-way through the school year. Malfoy and his activities had been under observation for some time by then.

Some of those activities had already affected other people, and some of them harked back to an incident that had taken place the previous year. And I think we have all been overlooking yet another case of "see it once, see it again". This one probably doesn't go anywhere, and it certainly wasn't ever openly admitted to have been relevant. But it seems reasonable to mention it. At the very least it adds a bit of background in an area where we otherwise have a blank.

In the year leading up to that overheard quarrel we saw the results of two separate attacks upon students. Students who unquestionably saw their attackers and yet who never told anyone who those attackers were.

Montague almost certainly saw that it was the Weasley twins who had stuffed him into that cabinet.

Katie Bell certainly saw that it was Madam Rosemerta who had given her that package and asked her to give it to the Headmaster.

Why did neither of them say anything?

In Montague's case, I think it might be reasonable to suspect that the twins Obliviated him before they shut the cabinet's door. They certainly did not volunteer to take the consequences



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of having attacked him when he returned. *Or* showed any concern that he was going to tell on them. Besides, an Obliviate in the middle of the scuffle would probably have given them a distinct advantage. Even in Montague's story to his friends on the Express he doesn't seem to have related how he got into the cabinet. Only how he got out of it. It would also explain at least part of his "dazed and confused" manner, upon his return.

With Katie, the business seems to have been a bit different, and rather more confusing. She had the package in her possession for a good 10–20 minutes before she started investigating it on the way back to the castle. And the curse (another element which seems to have been copied from an Arcade game) was clearly a major shock to her system. What is more, she was quickly transferred to St Mungo's and isolated from her friends for a period of some months where she had no opportunity to speak of the attack. Nor did she speak of the attack upon her return to the school. By that time, if she had made an official report to the DMLE they would no doubt have cautioned her not to speak of it to others.

But there is still no obvious reason to assume that she did not remember the incident.

Unless, of course, Rosemerta Imperiused her in turn, and instructed her both to give it to the Headmaster and to forget who had given the package to her.

Well. Okay. What else do these two attacks have in common?

Who was the very first person called in, in both cases? Oh that's right.

Professor Snape.

Who we now know was a highly-competent Legilimens.

If he was running up against an Obliviate with Montague he



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would not necessarily have been able to determine that it was the Weasleys who shut Montegue in the cabinet. But I am reasonably sure that the boy did tell him about *being* in the cabinet, and that Snape had cautioned Montegue not to speak of the matter. The cabinet may even have been moved into the Room of Hidden Things on Snape's authority to get something that dangerous out of the way (I suspect that most of the staff knows about the Room, whatever delusions of grandeur Tom Riddle may be harboring about its secrecy). Snape would have reported the incident to Albus as soon as he saw him again. And taken him to examine the cabinet, as well. He may even have been able to tell Albus that the cabinet at the other end was in a shop somewhere. Possibly even which shop. Snape is very good at figuring out puzzles.

In the case of suspected Imperius-fueled forgetfulness, I'm not sure whether even Legilimency could have made it possible to do an end-run around the problem (although Albus's experience with Morfin Gaunt suggests that it is a viable hypothesis). I doubt that Snape would have left Katie under the Imperius curse, any more than he left her to the curse from the necklace. But once her condition was stabilized, he would certainly have cautioned her not to speak of the matter to her schoolmates. And he would have certainly reported his findings to Albus. Indeed they may have chosen to send her off to St Mungo's to remove her from the temptation to talk about it. As well as to make sure that Rosemerta's inexperienced Imperius was properly removed.

Ergo: there is a fighting chance that Snape and Albus knew about the Rosemerta complication by the middle of October.

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I think they must have been alert to the possibility of a covert attack from that quarter from that point on. (Slughorn's poisoned mead may have been purchased before the first Hogsmeade Saturday and had slipped in under the radar.)

Well, okay. But what does all that amount to?

For one thing, it certainly doesn't sound like, between them, Snape and Albus took very aggressive measures to put a stop to random murder attempts, did they? Just Filch inspecting things carried in at the door and a lot of people dithering fruitlessly about the attack on Katie.

It's almost like they didn't want to put a stop to such attempts.

Well, maybe Albus didn't. Albus has a track record for being a bit careless about other people's safety. Maybe he thought that if they could get Malfoy to make another attempt without an invasion in the background that was all to the good, wasn't it? Especially if they could catch him at it. Then they could deal with him by himself, without having to raise the question from their end. After all, over the first half of the series, Albus always appeared to have had a fetish for catching wrongdoers in the act, before witnesses.

Unfortunately, after his 2nd botched murder attempt, the one which nearly killed Ron, Draco seems to have frightened himself out of making any further such attempts and concentrated all of his efforts on facilitating the invasion.



Which brings me to a reasonable stopping point, allowing us all to jump directly to the night of Albus's murder.

Continued in the following essay:

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We continue with examination of the evidence in the case of the Fallen Headmaster...



Which brings us up to the night of the main event. And its prelude:

The Adventure of the Dark Lord's Sea Cave.

That expedition can't have been altogether irrelevant, either, you know.

I suspect it was an intrinsic part of the staging of Dumbledore's exit.

It was Act Three, Scene Two, in fact.

However, once again, we need to back up a bit. We've yet another collection of minor curiosities to sort out first. Mostly regarding the Room of Requirement.

Which is to say, Act Three, Scene One.



Harry Potter was unable to find or to enter the unknowable, unplotable Room of Hidden Things when Malfoy needed it to be inaccessible. Whenever Malfoy was in residence it was literally off the map.

We do not know what limits on access to the Room applied to Albus. (Or, for that matter, to Trelawney, or the rest of the staff.)

The stair to Albus's office is around on the other side of the castle from the Room of Requirement, as Harry pointed out to Tonks when she encountered him near the RoR one evening, claiming to be looking for Dumbledore. (Although since you evidently have to go past the RoR to get from the main



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stairway to the Headmaster's stair I don't know why Harry felt he had to inform her of the fact. She had been educated at Hogwarts, too.)

But Dumbledore's private quarters are evidently near enough to the Room that he had managed to blunder into it one night, looking for the loo. Or at least so he claimed. At this point, I'm inclined to chalk that claim down to being another of Albus's "likely stories."

And if you were in a position of stewardship to that castle, and you know that the castle contains a room which is so ripe for misuse, if not downright disaster, wouldn't you have set up some form of surveillance on it? Or IN it. Indeed, mightn't you *inherit* some form of surveillance on it? At the very least, the tapestry opposite the door might stand duty as a sentry to inform you of when someone enters it.

No, I really don't think that we can accept Tom Riddle's assumption that Albus was too law-abiding to know about that Room. Albus Dumbledore was a law unto himself.



So let's take another look at what we know about the timetable for the relevant evening.

Act Three, Scene One

Just before curfew, which, since we are approaching the summer solstice, is around sunset, Harry was summoned by Dumbledore to come to his office at once. Hurrying along the 7th floor corridor, he hears a shriek and a crash and rounds the corner to find Trelawney sprawled on the floor with her sherry bottles. She engages him with an account of having



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walked into the Room of Hidden Things to hear someone start whooping in celebration, piles on a querulous complaint about being afflicted by sudden darkness and rudely ejected from the room, she then maunders on about her inner eye and the Lightning-Struck Tower, and finishes up (no doubt thanks to free-association) with her account of the night Albus hired her and Snape had been ejected from the Hog's Head. We do not know how long she delayed Harry, but it was at least a couple of minutes. Whoever was in the room is still in there.

Harry manages to get rid of her, and continues to Albus's office in response to his summons.

Harry finds Albus on the point of departure. They discuss Malfoy celebrating in the Room of Requirement, Trelawney's story of Snape having fitted up Harry's parents by telling Voldemort of the Prophecy, and once again raise the question of whose side Snape is on, anyway. Albus repeats the "likely story" of Snape's remorse and his own forgiveness back in 1981. He clearly considers telling Harry something more, but resists the temptation. Malfoy, meanwhile probably sneaks out of the Room and returns to Slytherin House.

Dumbledore invites Harry to accompany him on a raid for one of the Horcruxes. Makes him promise to obey orders. Then, curiously, he sends Harry off to "get his cloak."

What Harry (who is already carrying his cloak — on Dumbledore's recommendation from earlier in the year) actually does is to alert his friends, give them the rest of his "lucky potion" and urge them to patrol. He and Dumbledore meet in the entrance hall and depart for Hogsmeade.

Dumbledore tells Harry he has already left arrangements for

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extra security measures during his absence. In fact, the castle is already being patrolled by both staff and Order members. Now Harry's friends have joined the party.

The patrols contain more Order members than staff apparently. The only one of Albus's patrol we don't already know to be an Order member is Flitwick. And maybe even he was by that time, although no one ever told us so, and it doesn't seem all that likely. Or relevant, either. Snape, however, is not included in these orders. He presumably remains in his own quarters, away from all sources of information. But although it is now after curfew, he does not prepare for bed.

Indeed, when Albus sends Harry off to "get his cloak," it is despite the fact that he should already be perfectly aware that he'd already instructed Harry to keep the cloak with him at all times at the beginning of the year, and has no reason to believe that Harry has failed to do so.

This is our first clear instance over the course of the evening where Harry has been distracted or has deliberately been got out of the way for a critical few minutes. It is not the last one, either.



Regarding Albus's somewhat curious behavior over the rest of the evening; what I currently am most inclined to suspect is that, from this point, in Albus we are getting an outside view of what Harry's behavior must have looked like to Ron and Hermione the night he was under the influence of the Felix Felicis potion.

We know that Slughorn had a batch of Felix with him when

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he showed up at the beginning of the year. The bottle of it that he awarded Harry only held one ounce of the stuff. What happened to the rest of it?

For that matter, once we discovered that the stuff takes six months to brew, we realize that Slughorn must have started that batch no later than the previous Spring — during the period he was allegedly squatting a week at a time in vacant Muggle houses. And Sluggy tells us that the stuff is fiendishly tricky to brew and disastrous to get wrong. Consequently, we have a gap in our information here. I suspected that there was more to Albus and Horace's association than we'd been told.

I even went so far as to say that I thought that Albus commissioned that batch of Felix Felicis from Slughorn, and we hadn't seen the last of it. For that matter, if heading out of the castle on the night you and your confederates intend to capture a Horcrux and stage your own murder doesn't constitute an appropriate opportunity to maximize your luck, I don't know what does.

It has been noted by a number of people that Albus seemed to be "feeling his way" through the whole sea cave adventure. I'd like to point out that the reading that he was watching the possibilities unfold and waiting for Felix to point out the best one certainly works for me.

But I've been wrong about any number of things before this, and I may be wrong about this as well.



If, as I believe, Albus has been monitoring Malfoy's progress with the cabinet all year, once Malfoy was reported as having entered the Room after Albus had repaired the cabinet for him,

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he took his dose of Felix and sent for Harry.

While waiting, he alerted the Staff, called in the Order members and set up the additional protections on the perimeter. He probably also gave Snape a heads-up that tonight's the night, as well as alerting his other partners (if any) in the conspiracy.

For that matter: insofar as the cabinet is concerned, how do we know that some form of surveillance was not already at the other end of the connection, in Borgin & Burkes, as well? I suspect that Dumbledore might have had some kind of dealings with old Caractacus Burke — after Burke's trusted assistant Riddle proved to be a thief and, it was suspected, a murderer. I don't get the impression that Borgin would refuse an offer of protection from the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot at the price of allowing a spy eye of some sort to be installed in the shop. Not with the kind of hell that has been breaking loose in the ww all that year.



And while we are at it: how did Trelawney get into the Room, when, after weeks of attempts, Harry never managed it? Did she have the fools' luck to blunder in during the few minutes that Malfoy wasn't there? When he was off in London *testing* the cabinet? He has to have briefly left the Room to do that. He'd hardly be whooping in celebration until he knew for sure that it was fixed.

I also suspect that Albus had already realized that he needed a good excuse to haul Harry out of the castle when the planned invasion was ready to go off. He had finally learned that lesson the year before. If Potter was left at liberty in the castle during

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Malfoy's invasion, he could be depended upon to mess with it, and that would be likely to prove fatal for somebody other than just Albus. The invasion and the staged murder was much too delicate a balancing act to risk Potter cluelessly mixing into it. Taking the boy out of the castle to hunt a Horcrux while the rest of the cast assembled, would be a much safer option. They might even manage to get one more of the accursed things settled before Albus made his exit, and that would leave the boy with only three to find and neutralize.

You will also notice that just about everything Albus did that evening was calculated to keep Harry from getting actively involved in the evening's main event, i.e., his own publicly-staged murder.



Dumbledore next makes a point of being seen (apparently alone, Harry is under his cloak on Dumbledore's orders) in Hogsmeade by Madam Rosemerta, before he and Harry Apparate to the coast. Malfoy is unlikely to set his trap until he knows that Albus is out of the castle. So Albus has just ensured that Malfoy will believe the way is fortuitously clear, and will initiate the invasion, before the DEs have the time to formulate any better plans than whatever group they can throw together on the spur of the moment. (Perhaps we need to consider the implications that they were able to muster as large a group as they did on as short a notice as they got.)

Malfoy passes the word by some as yet unknown means to one of his confederates outside the castle (not Madam Rosemerta, I think. Not for this) and the invasion team is called up on some-

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thing like an hour's notice. (ETA: if it's possible for DEs to zap call each other through their marks we might finally have a convincing reason for why Malfoy might actually have one. However, from what we got in DHs the mark only conveys the signal to Tom — although other DEs in the vicinity will also feel the message go out. Nevertheless, if Malfoy is marked, using his mark to notify Tom that the way is clear would also be readily explained.)

While we are on the subject: just in case there's anyone reading who hasn't read the first of this pair of essays, can you say, for certain, that Albus hadn't already figured out Madam Rosemerta's coerced involvement in Malfoy's plotting? I really, really doubt it.

I suspect that he had figured that much out at least by the time he heard about the bottle of poisoned mead, and even more probably quite soon after the attack on Katie Bell. His pretending to only realize it during the conversation with Malfoy was intended to pass that information to Harry, thereby tying off a loose end, and ensuring that the situation would be rectified after he was gone. Had Harry not been available to serve as message-bearer, some other means would undoubtedly have been found.

And finally we get the trip into the cave itself.



Albus's statements and much of his behavior are calculated to give us the impression that he had never been in the cave himself, although he clearly already knows the Inferi are stashed there. In fact, he knows a suspiciously large amount about what he and Harry found in that cave for a man who allegedly has never been there before.

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I really suspect that he had been there before. Once, at least, and perhaps quite recently.

On John Granger's Hogwarts Professor's discussion forums (in an iteration that is now no longer online—or not in its original version) the question was once posted as to how Dumbledore learned of the cave in the first place.

Along with several other fans, I believed that Albus “found” that cave in his own memories. He told us all the way back in GoF that he was in the habit of off-loading and re-examining memories in a Pensieve, which made it easier to organize what he knew. Acto Rowling, such organization is necessary for developing the skills required for effective Occlumency and Legilimency. Evidently this organization is an ongoing process.

When he reviewed his own memory of delivering Tom Riddle's Hogwarts letter before sharing it with Harry, Mrs Cole's account of the two children who went off into a cave with Riddle at the seaside and never were the same afterwards set off all sorts of warning bells. I think he spent the next several weeks determining just what part of the seacoast that orphanage had taken the children to for their summer outings back in the late 1930s, and had been investigating the surrounding cliffs. Not all solutions to wizards' problems are to be found in the wizarding world, after all.

In the wake of DHs, we can now also suspect that he may have got a glimpse of the cave — and the Inferi in it — and possibly the fountain as well, in the course of questioning Kreacher after Sirius Black's death. He does admit to having used Legilimency on Kreacher to discover the causes for the debacle at the DoM.

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It seems very likely that he caught a glimpse of the cave in his questioning regarding Kreacher's Master. I would guess that House Elves are as prone to free-association as humans, and Kreacher clearly never really considered *Sirius* Black his Master. But other than that glimpse, which would have been suggestive, I doubt that Albus got much more useful information from Kreacher.

And he may have been trying to find out where he place was since the previous June. If so, he either did not do as fine a job of Legilimency as he thought he had, or Kreacher had managed somehow to feint him into pursuing the false locket rather than searching his own nest.

The Locket may also not still have been in the house by the time he was questioning Kreacher, however. Mundungus might have already lifted it. And, for that matter, Albus does claim that he does not know *which* Horcrux they are likely to be finding in that cave. But the degree of faith one might put in that claim is optional.



We already know that Riddle likes to revisit the scenes of his earlier triumphs. Albus knows this too. And terrorizing two of the other children to the point of causing them permanent damage is something Riddle would have certainly accounted a triumph. Riddle also has a habit of acquiring such properties if he can. I am fully confident that he himself is the “absent, rich” owner of the Riddle house. And he probably owns the old Gaunt property as well, even if only by means of fiddling the land records in his uncle Morfin's absence. He also has certainly taken possession of that cave.

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I rather think that he brought the two other orphans there to the antechamber, and then possibly immobilized them, and sat watching while he taunted them, and then left as the tide came in. Their own panic managed to override his control, and they managed to escape. But he kept them from telling anyone exactly what he had done. I doubt that as a child of 10 or less, he had managed to get any further into the cave complex.

For my own part, I am convinced that the inner chamber of that cave, the lake, and the fountain are all far older than Riddle, although Riddle may have tampered with any of them. I also think that when Riddle returned to the cave as an adult, and a trained wizard, he realized, as Albus did, that the place had “known magic” And searched until he found the entrance.

When Albus got there some fifty years later the same principle still applied. That cave has been magical for a long, long time.

Although, now that we can be reasonably sure that Tom only hid the Locket in that cave around 1980, there may have been much more recent magical traces for Albus to be aware of.

Actually now that we come right down to it, I think that some of Albus’s behavior on our trip to that cave with Harry must have also been performance art. He had already gotten into that cave once before. Kreachur, notwithstanding, that’s how he knew about the blood-price door, as well as Inferi. And he obviously already knew about the Inferi. I don’t think it was just through having got a glimpse of them via Kreachur.

He also obviously knew about the fountain, although he probably hadn’t made any serious attempt to drain it on his first trip. He may have just run some diagnostics on the problem.

And he evidently decided that getting whatever was hidden

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in the fountain out of it would make a nice project in which to involve Harry. Since he knew he needed such a project.



So. Just what is the potion in the Birdbath of Doom, anyway? Well; it’s green.

And it glows.

And it sounds altogether *nasty*.

— And if what we all witnessed there was another piece of “performance art,” we haven’t a clue as to what it actually *does*.

Apart from keeping anyone from touching it, that is. Or getting at anything that may be in the basin with it. We do not know whether it works the way the maybe-barrier charm allegedly cast on the staircase does and only keeps out persons who are not wearing a Dark mark. But it is far more likely that it was designed to keep out everybody. I wondered whether Tom himself may have had some handy way of getting past it, but downstream of DHs that doesn’t seem to be the case. All he needed to do was turn it transparent to see that the Horcrux was missing.

And we can’t necessarily believe a word of what Albus told us about it, either. Particularly when even what he *did* tell us was presented as a lot of gosh-and-guesswork.

I’m not convinced that Dumbledore wasn’t speculating completely without evidence on the potion’s effects. Mostly to play down the risk, so Harry would follow through on his orders. I would certainly not take the accuracy of any his statements regarding the potion for granted. He couldn’t really know (although if he does suspect that Kreachur was forced to drink

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it, Kreachur at least survived the experience). He suspected that the drinker wouldn't be able to drain the basin on their own initiative, and he was pretty sure that the drinker wouldn't immediately drop down dead. But that is about all he could really count on. Even Felix couldn't show him much more than that. Although it might have convinced him that the potion wouldn't kill him outright.

Of course depending upon just when the Horcrux was supposedly put into the cave there is the off-chance that Snape might have been able to fill him in on that potion. But we can't count on that, either. The potion may have been a feature of that cave decades before the Horcrux was. Although it might be hard to account for why. And Rowling, at least, doesn't seem to think it was.

Dumbledore no doubt had sufficient reason to suspect that the potion wouldn't kill him instantly (or possibly at all, although it might make him pretty sick). But, yes, I do think he may have been spinning theories to order to try to put Harry at his ease and make the task more doable, even if not easy, in order to force Harry to go on feeding him the potion, despite its effects.

Or it's *apparent* effects. That could have been acting. Or at least exaggeration.



Of course, one rather ugly suggestion is that the green potion may be an intrinsic part of what creates Inferi.

If you haven't drunk the potion you will simply be dead. If you have, there may be one more Inferus floating in the lake.

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Maybe. Nothing like for certain.

But the way that everything on that island is set up, the potion seems to be calibrated to be vile enough to prevent anyone from finishing it off AND to drive its drinker to the lake for water. Plus, no other water source seems to be permitted on that island.

Unless Albus was being twisty and vanishing the water Harry summoned himself. But I doubt it. I don't think he would have done anything that would lead Harry to mess with the lake.

Touching the water of the lake clearly signals the Inferi to drag you under and drown you. (*ahem* Haven't we — and Harry — learned about something called a bubble-head charm? Everyone was using it in the halls in OotP to fend off the stink of dungbombs.)

But, in any case, one would have to say that the green potion appears to be an intrinsic component of a trap. And it is at least a viable hypothesis that the potion is calibrated to work in concert with the lake water to produce an Inferus. This theory, fortunately, appears to be rather less likely in the wake of DHs.

What appears to be missing from this trap, however, is the bait. The faintly glimmering green light in the center of the cave might very well draw the curious to check it out. But there is nothing which we were shown about that set-up which would tempt a trespasser to *drink* that potion. (It's *glowing* for heaven's sake!)

And the fact that the boat only takes one wizard at a time makes it highly unlikely that a prisoner would be brought to the island, forced to drink the potion and shoved in to be drowned. Unless everybody got on and off the island in relays.

But, under normal circumstances, there seems to be no

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reason why anyone who did not already know that something was hidden in the bottom of that basin would risk drinking the potion to get to it.

So, unless there is (as Swythiv put it) some goofy legend about a fountain of youth, or arcane wisdom, or specific knowledge (or unpleasant truths), attached to that Cave and that Fountain, then either wizards are even more feckless than they are usually presented, or there was some compulsion involved (although it did not seem to work on Harry. But then, neither does Imperius).

Or Albus was just making up “likely stories” on the spur of the moment again.

Which raises a few other possibilities.



Oh, snap. I think I may have it.

Well, maybe not. But this seems to play reasonably well with things we already have been told.

(I mean it isn't as if Rowling is ever going to explain it to us. The whole set-up was just one more “use once and discard” plot token to her.)

Why Albus dragged Harry to the cave and ordered him to force him to drink the potion. And also why Tom wasn't about to try drinking it himself.

The potion induces Remorse. That is its purpose. And it isn't lethal unless your soul is so badly compromised that you are likely to die of the pain of the remorse that's generated.

Yes, Albus knew that he needed to get Harry out of the castle if Draco was bringing in an invasion force. The last thing

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he wanted was to leave Harry in a position to mess with it. Yes, he had discovered that this was probably one of Tom's Horcrux hideaways, and that he wanted to get one more of them settled before his exit. But he also knew his own time was nearly up and he didn't have an easy conscience.

He wanted to repair whatever damage his soul had taken by a lifetime of misjudgments and bad decisions before he made Snape kill him.

Albus had full access to those nasty Dark Arts books that concerned souls for years. And I *still* say that that cave was far older than Tom Riddle.



I rather think that if Tom had been normal, and not power-mad, he might have made a very decent historian. He seems to have been fascinated by legends, and wonders, (and prophecies). And in the very off chance that he did create that cave he certainly was working from some extremely traditional templates.

But I still don't think he did make that cave. I think he and the two younger children from the orphanage got into the ante-chamber when Tom was 9 or 10 and he had a highly successful afternoon terrorizing them there.

But Tom likes to revisit scenes of his triumphs, and he takes possession of them if he can. When he got back to the cave, after he'd had some magical training, he was able to recognize that the place had “known magic.”

And I don't know whether he had to wait until he was an adult, or if the orphanage made another summer trip there later, during his school years (which, when you stop to think

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of it is very likely). I would bet that if the later is the case, a place like that cave might very well be referenced somewhere in Hogwarts library, and have a history of its own.

It wasn't just his own ancestry and the creation of Horcruxes that Tom researched. I rather expect that our Tom spent a lot of time in the library. I'll bet he staked out a corner of it as his own and held court there under the staff's noses.



We've still got all sorts of unanswered questions about that cave, however. Harry saw the body of at least one wizard in that lake, his robes trailing in the water. That was probably supposed to be Regulus Black (given how simplistic most of Rowling's official answers have since turned out to be). But we have no info as to whether Regulus is now an Inferus, or simply a corpse floating in the water.

The Inferi who attacked Harry were all dressed in rags, not robes. Yet unless there was some magical element involved, you would not expect a mere corpse to be so... intact after some 17 years, even if there are no fish in that lake to mess with it. (ETA: given that Dumbledore's body was almost perfectly preserved after nearly a year's burial, it is possible that the green potion contains some powerful preservative elements.)

And we have another puzzle as to who refilled the basin after Regulus drank the potion to switch the locket. It is possible that Reggie simply used the spell Harry used to keep refilling Slughorn's bottles when he got Sluggy and Hagrid drunk, and extended the residue of the potion once he lowered the level enough to get hold of the Locket, but Kreachur didn't stay

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to see him do it, and Tom doesn't ever seem to have gone back there until just before the final battle. Some 18 years later.

So we do appear to have some evidence that the basin does refill of itself. When Tom went to check on his Horcrux, he turned the potion clear to see into the basin. i.e., by the time he got there, there was potion in the basin. Albus and Harry certainly didn't stop to refill it, but in the year since they had been there it had refilled. Acto Kreachur, Tom refilled the basin with fresh potion after Kreachur had drunk it, but we do not know whether he was the one who put the potion that Kreachur drank into the basin in the first place. It now looks as though it may have already been there, and Kreachur does not tell us whether Tom brought fresh potion to the cave to refill the basin or simply used the refill spell on the residue. I suspect the later.

And it doesn't really explain why Kreachur would have had to drink the potion in order for Tom to put the Locket into the basin in the first place. Had he tried to do it before on an earlier trip, and the Locket had simply sat there floating on the top of the surface? A "heavy gold Locket" ought to be heavier than most liquids, and simply sink to the bottom, regardless.

And I still don't think the potion is lethal in itself, however painful. But it induces a great thirst and if you touch the lake, the Inferi drag you under and drown you. If he hadn't already been determined to suicide, — which really now seems inarguable — Regulus might have ordered Kreachur to take him home with the Horcrux. He would probably have recovered in time, and, I suspect repaired his soul of whatever damage had been done during his stint as a DE.

(I still have a lot of problem with the statement that the basin

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can only be emptied by drinking the stuff. If you can scoop it up with a conjured crystal goblet You ought to be able to scoop it up with 12 conjured crystal goblets. Or transfigure a hole in the basin.)

At a guess — and we are way off the map here, into the land of wild-ass theories braying in the wilderness — that cave was an ancient place intended for the purification of the Champion before battle, or the God-King's last ordeal before meeting his destiny. The spell which prevents any other water source on the island is probably also original. One drank from the fountain, and then drank from the lake, and the two combined into some form of healing of any spiritual ills that would impair the Champion's performance. Or prevent his unworthiness for a proper reward in the afterlife if he failed. He didn't need to drain the fountain, but he did need to drink from it.

What Tom did was to take possession of the place and defile it, booby-trapping the lake by stocking it with Inferi. But anything as ancient as that cave and that fountain has probably been written of somewhere. And Albus had just as much access to the Hogwarts library as Tom did. And for a great deal longer.

Of course, in the wake of DHs, we realize there probably is a legend about that cave. It's probably right there in some collection like Beedle's.



What seems most likely from what little we do know is that Voldemort was gambling on the probability that any trespassers finding a basin of glowing green ook which they could not even touch would eventually just give up and go away. If the

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Inferi didn't get them first. Which they probably would.

Because, really, Albus's story about keeping the drinker alive long enough to be questioned only works if there is a security system on the place set up to ensure that any drinker will BE questioned.

And there isn't. There is absolutely no monitoring on the cave to alert Voldemort that he has an intruder there. There never has been. So delaying intruders for questioning can't really be the purpose of that potion. No one is going to be summoned to question anybody in that cave. Voldemort obviously doesn't care if the Inferi drown all intruders without learning how they got there.

What I think was going on was that, if he didn't have inside information on it already (which, depending upon when the Horcrux was supposed to have been put into the cave, he just might have), Albus was prepared to gamble that a person could drink the potion and survive — at least for a while — if he could manage not to be dragged underwater and drowned by the Inferi in the attempt.

Following that script, Albus might even have swallowed a bezoar before departing from the castle with Harry (although that might have interfered with the Felix, so maybe not), or while Harry's back was turned to get him some water after he staged his first "collapse". (Incidence #2 of Harry's attention being deliberately diverted for a critical few seconds.) He might have possibly had a vial of Phoenix tears about him, or some other antidote. Possibly even a specific antidote, if he was able to bring a sample of the potion out of the cave the first time. All he really needed was something to keep him going until he kept

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his appointment with Snape on top of the Astronomy tower.



Which reminds me:

Harry did not see the Horcrux lying in the bottom of the basin through the potion.

My first reading of this description was that the potion must evidently be opaque. But this may not, in fact, be the case. The potion may, in addition to being luminous, be reflective. Highly reflective. So reflective that if the trespasser has any light source of his own — such as a wand casting Lumos, the light so generated will reflect off the surface of the potion and prevent him from seeing into the basin.

In order to see into the basin, the trespasser would need to douse his own light and wait for his eyes to adjust to the dimness until the potion's own luminescence is enough to reveal what is concealed within. Albus and Harry did not do this on their trip into the cave. It is unknown whether Albus might have done so on his trip there, alone. If so, he would have seen that the locket in the basin was not the one that disappeared from Hepzibah Smith's collection, and realized that he was at a dead end, unless the false locket also contained a clue. But this is not likely to be information that we are ever going to be filled in on.

Still, I think it highly unlikely that Tom knew a spell to make that potion go transparent and Albus didn't. So if Albus didn't use it when Harry was with him, it raises the possibility that he didn't want to risk the chance that *Harry* would recognize that the locket in the basin was not the locket from Hepzibah's col-

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lection and start raising objections. Which would suggest that Albus might already be aware of that fact himself.

Not that I can prove it.



At this point I suddenly find myself taking an abrupt side trip. Just because I think that some of the above is the most likely explanation, does not mean it is the only explanation. Not by a long chalk.

There are a couple of other theories out there which, although easily dismissible individually, really do hang together into a fairly plausible, even if somewhat over-complex explanation for what appeared to be going on in that cave.

One of these is Professor_Mum's (and others') Cave!-Stand-In theory.

The idea that the Albus who accompanied Harry to the cave was not, in fact, Albus is not a new one. Indeed this theory was quite popular across the fandom in the pause between the release of HBP and that of DHs. We included a rather fun early iteration of that one in our collaboration 'WHO KILLED ALBUS DUMBLEDORE?' (Zossima Press, 2006). Wherein the author proposed that Cave!Albus was, in fact, Horace Slughorn. Professor_Mum, and most other theorists exploring the idea of a stand-in, more usually propose that the cave stand-in was in fact Snape.

Unfortunately, the original rationale of most such theories was to facilitate variants of Dumbledore-isn't-Dead. Rowling put paid to that goal in August, 2006.

However, establishing that Albus is, in fact, dead, has not altogether succeeded in derailing the Cave!Substitution theo-

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ries. They continue to march intrepidly across the landscape like a battery-operated plot bunny. Even more unfortunately, however, without the Dumbledore-isn't-Dead conclusion, any attempt to determine a purpose now being served by such theories tends to boil down into; "Albus was acting really strange in that cave, and the idea is cool!"

I'm afraid this is just not good enough. The explanation of; "We can't know what purpose it served until the final book." is even worse. If there is any chance of a theory being viable (whether it turns out to be correct or not) it must be seen to have served a purpose at the time it happened, in the book in which it appeared. Even if that particular purpose was not its only, or even its main purpose.

Consequently I hadn't a particularly high opinion of the Cave!Substitution theories which had been waved at me. Not even the very clever and well-examined ones. I agreed that, yes, it was clever, and yes, Albus was acting very oddly in the cave. I even agreed that it would not be too much of a stretch to suppose that if Snape had been impersonating Albus he might have acted in very much the same way. And, yes, the idea was cool. But that didn't make it a viable theory unless you could explain the why of it. *Why* should Snape have substituted for Albus in the cave? Why was it necessary?

And to a very late point we were still missing it. Because, really, the idea of Albus telling Harry to "go get your cloak" and then changing places with Snape, in itself does nothing to advance the plot. It's the whole bogus Half-Blood Prince mystery all over again. It didn't matter a hill of beans who the Half-Blood Prince was — just so long as Harry had access to his book.

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It was the book itself that Harry needed in Year 6, not the identity of the Prince.

However, with the Half-Blood Prince mystery, I thought we just hadn't been given the punch line yet. I was sure that at some point in Book 7 it would finally become very important that Harry be aware that that annotated copy of Advanced Potion-Making had once been Snape's book. (More fool I, evidently!)

But there is still no question that Harry needed access to that book. And he needed it in 6th year.

So I was beginning to wonder about the cave, myself. I was a long way from buying the theory of there having been any substitution in the cave adventure. But if there had been, it had to have served a necessary purpose. By the time DHs was pending, I rather thought that I was beginning to get a glimmer of what — assuming there was a substitution — it may have been about.

First: you need to ask the right questions.



The first right question is: If it wasn't Albus in the cave, was it Albus on the tower? And I really cannot see any rationale within Rowling's insistence that Albus is dead, for it not to have been Albus on the tower.

And that *was* definitely Snape during the Flight of the Prince. Snape was under observation by either Harry or Malfoy from the time he got to the top of the tower until he Apparated away at the main gate, so whoever it was that got thrown off the top of the tower, it was not Severus Snape.

The second right question is: If Albus didn't drink the potion in the cave, was he really dying on top of the tower? And this, I

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think, is probably the crux of the matter.

If he really was dying — and it certainly looked to me like he was — and he *hadn't* drunk that potion, then I'd say his death certainly hadn't come upon him over the course of just one evening.

Therefore: if this is the case, then that wasn't Albus that Harry spoke with in Albus's office. That was the stand-in. The substitution had already taken place. And if this was a Polyjuice double, it was a double of Albus from a hair sample taken earlier in the year. Before his Elixir ran out.

Ergo: by that point in the year, Albus was already actively dying. He wasn't physically up to taking part in any adventures in any cave. He barely managed to get to Hogsmead, fly back to the tower, and stay upright through the confrontation with Draco.

But Harry still had to be removed from the castle during the invasion.

By that evening, Albus had run out of the Elixir. He was failing. He had been hanging on until June, and conserving his energy in his rooms.

So what disrupted their plans? Because something had, or Harry wouldn't have been sent off to get his cloak. The program that evening was for a Horcrux hunt. Way hey, and off to adventure!

I think it was Harry himself who had disrupted the plan. "Albus" had been expecting a curious Harry, not a furious one.

Well, if that was really Snape, he can probably see the shadow of Tom Riddle at the back of Harry's eyes as well as Albus can by this time. He had all of a school term the year before to learn to recognize it. And given that Tom has red eyes

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these days, it can't be all that difficult. (Although unlikely.)

And it may well be that if that was Snape, passing on his standard cover story of repentance and forgiveness then it's no wonder it matched the variation he gave us at Spinner's End.

And he felt he needed to report this sudden spanner in the works to Albus before they left. It wouldn't have taken long. But it might have had some potential impact on Albus's tower performance later.

Also: regarding the cave adventure. If that was Snape (or Slughorn) in the cave, then he drank the Potion in order to explain the collapsing Albus that he changed places with in Hogsmeade. There is no way that even Harry would have believed the reasonably healthy Albus he left with was the same wizard who was falling into his last sleep on the tower without a good excuse. The green Potion made an excellent excuse.



In this scenario, Albus, meanwhile, was back at Hogwarts monitoring the situation while waiting for Snape's signal when he and Harry had returned to Hogsmeade. He had a nip of Polyjuice standing by, too. From the same batch that Snape was using. Restoring himself to a last hour's worth of strength to see the performance out. We watched it wear off on the tower.

And I think that if the Headmaster of Hogwarts is able to lift the anti-Apparition barrier from the Great Hall for a class, he was certainly able to lift it from his own office, in order to facilitate the return switch. The barrier would without doubt be restored by his death, when he would no longer be Headmaster.

And as for that return switch: I think Professor_Mum did

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indeed catch the moment it happened, *if* it happened.

In Hogsmeade. Harry Apparates himself and Albus(?) into the village and upon arrival has a disoriented moment where he is convinced he still sees Ineri creeping toward him around the sides of the shops. He blinks, and there is nothing there. We don't know how long this moment takes, Harry may not have the best way of telling.

Certainly not if he was Confunded.

How many times now has Rowling waved the Confundus Charm under our noses?

In PoA Snape excuses the trio attacking him to Fudge with the claim that Black must have Confunded them.

In GoF Crouch/Moody claims that someone must have Confunded the Goblet in order for it to accept Harry's name as an entry from a bogus fourth school.

Earlier in HBP we watched Hermione Confund McLaggon at the Quidditch trials. (And a couple of weeks after school breaks up she Confunds her parents into emigrating to Australia under false identities as a childless couple.)

How do we know that Harry wasn't Confunded to facilitate a switch?

Albus got the signal and drank his Polyjuice, Apparated to Hogsmeade, where Snape had already Confunded Harry and they switch places. Snape Apparates back to Albus's office.

And there was no reasonable way that Snape could have known that the locket he scooped into his pocket in the rush at the cave wasn't the right one until he got back to the castle. He hadn't time to examine it before that. And he may not have had a chance to examine it then, either. For that matter, if

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there was a substitution, he had been working blind in that cave, since although I still think Albus had been there before, I very much doubt that Snape had been. He was working strictly from Albus's report.

Upon his return, he Flooed from the Headmaster's office to Slughorn's. There he passed the locket over to Sluggy to later pass on to Harry, swallowed a bezoar or other antidote for the green stuff. (Or threw it up. It may not have been particularly toxic at all. Just a barrier device.)

And then he may have also taken something to cancel the Polyjuice. A dose of auto-Polyjuice from one of his own hairs if nothing else. We do not know if there is such a thing as an antidote to Polyjuice, but then we also don't know that there isn't, and he would have wanted to be in his own form before he Flooed to his own office to wait for his next cue. Sluggy may have also been monitoring the invasion and been able to tell him what he was going to be walking into.

After all, Snape really didn't seem surprised by anything he found on the tower either, did he? Not even the presence of Greyback.



It does all hang together.

I'm not a bit convinced, mind you. But it does hang together.

I'll admit that I never seriously expected it to. But, to my surprise, it does.

Rather well, in fact.

I'll leave the decision of whether to make use of it up to the fanfic writers.

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I have also been wondering whether the sea cave adventure may not have been another Madam-Rosemerta-is-under-Imperius-style message.

Albus pretended to “suddenly realize” that Madam Rosemerta was under Imperius, expecting Harry to take it from there and pass the word to someone in authority, to straighten the matter out. It’s possible that he may have also deliberately shown Harry where Voldemort’s army of Inferi are kept hidden for very much the same reason. And that’s a blow that could be struck against the Dark Lord without much risk on Harry’s part. All Harry has to do is *tell* somebody. Before Voldemort moves them out of there and puts them into play.

(About this point I found myself rather wishing that Fudge really did have a private army of heliopaths. They would have come in awfully useful in that kind of a job.)



So long as we are wandering in a wilderness of wild-ass theories: if Albus already knew that the Locket was the Horcrux that was supposed to be in the sea cave, and that it had already been stolen, then, strange as it may seem, to drink the potion (and take the false Horcrux out of the equation?) must have been one of the main purposes for making the trip there. And he knew that he would need somebody’s help in order to do it.

Assuming there was NO substitution, and that really was Albus, he also needed to give Harry a plausible reason which would account for why he later did not, or “could not,” defend

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himself when the DEs cornered him. There had to be a plausible reason to account for the fact that he neither attempted to escape, nor to fight back. Or at least a reason that would play for the time being. After all, getting himself murdered was the whole *point* of this exercise.

He might have set up the required scene establishing his “helplessness” in some other way, but if he did know about Reggie, then he probably also knew about the Locket at #12, and that Locket had already gone walkabout. He may even have wanted to retrieve the fake in order to introduce the R.A.B. complication to Harry. Or maybe just to keep Harry from blundering into the cave later, unsupervised, if he came across that trail from some other direction.

Because if the real Locket was the one at #12, then it had gone missing, and despite following various leads on it all year, he has not been able to relocate it. And now his time for that job has run out. He has to pass the torch to Harry.

And, of course, from a meta standpoint Albus also had to introduce the great, whopping, red herring of R.A.B. and the adventure of the sea cave Horcrux to the reader in order to distract and confuse us all, so we won’t just automatically assume that “of course” Albus faked his death; who else is there who might have done so? For I rather think that we were supposed to suspect that *someone* had. Rowling wanted to drop a bombshell on our heads. Even even if it turned out to be a fake one that just popped out a flag printed “BANG!”

But, really, just as with the blasted hand; for all that drinking the potion appeared to leave him staggering, reeling, and falling down in a faint every 20 minutes, it didn’t really seem to

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keep him from doing anything, not even some pretty impressive things, whenever he actually *needed* to, did it?

Incidence #3 of attempting to divert Harry's attention took place on their arrival in Hogsmeade and Albus's second "collapse." This attempt was almost immediately deflected by Madam Rosemerta. Knowing what we do now, she had undoubtedly been instructed to watch from her window for sight of Dumbledore, and to point the Dark mark out to him to draw him back to the castle, and into ambush.



Which (finally!) brings us right up to the Grand Climax. The private performance on top of the "Lightning-Struck" Tower.

As well as incidence #4 of attempting to divert Harry's attention: Dumbledore appears to have intended to send Harry to summon Snape to the tower before the invaders got there. We don't know how that particular script was supposed to play out, because it got derailed. There was probably some alternate plan to immobilize Harry so he wouldn't meddle, if his own prudence didn't dictate discretion. Or if he couldn't have simply been got out of the way by sending him to the hospital wing to alert Madam Pomfrey.

(Thank heavens for Minerva and Flitwick, otherwise the message might not have reached Snape in time.)

Actually, as of Friday, July 13, 2007 Professor_Mum raised a question which may shed a bit of light on this particular puzzle.

Was Harry supposed to get the same treatment as Flitwick?

Run to Snape, (give him his cue), and get stunned for his trouble?



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It would certainly have taken him out of the way and kept him from messing with the invasion. There would have been a risky point where he had to pass the RoR to get to the main stairs down to Snape's office, but I think Albus would have been fairly confident that running an emergency message to Snape that Albus was in distress on the tower would have kept him from being deflected.



Because it is just possible that for once what happened *wasn't* what was meant to happen. I have been assuming that Harry was needed as a witness, because that is the purpose he served. But I may have been wrong about that.

Did Albus and Snape really *need* a non-DE witness to Albus's murder, carrying back the details of how it happened? If Harry had not been there, what would the staff and the Order have assumed to have happened?

Albus would have still been dead.

The show would have still gone on. The show wasn't primarily for Harry's benefit. It was for Tom's, Draco's, and the DEs'. They are the ones who were supposed to be carrying back the reports of it.

If the murder was staged; the "Severus, please..." pleas were a part of the performance. They need no further explanation.

The Order and the staff would have presumed that Albus was dead at the hands of the DEs and that Snape had gone with them to get them out of the castle and — possibly — to go into deeper cover. Harry, once he woke up, might have mentioned the potion, but even that isn't certain. He would have no doubt



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have told them that Albus was seriously ill when they returned to the castle, however.

Snape and Draco would have still bolted, along with the invaders. But Snape might have been a bit more likely to be understood to have gone into deep cover by his fellow Order members, and he might have got a message out to the Order and been readily believed. (ETA: his return the following year as a puppet Headmaster, might not have been met with *quite* such a level of hostility.)

Either Hagrid or Slughorn would have later given the locket to Harry saying that Albus had it with him. The whole point of Harry's part of the adventure was to get him out of the way, and then to give him the locket so he could deal with it. Either as a Horcrux, or as a clue to finding one.

But with an invasion in the mix, with an unknown number of invaders and some uncertainty as to who they would actually be, the timing of the matter was precarious and they must have both known that they could not depend upon things falling out to their best advantage. That Harry might serve as a possible witness may have only been a part of Plan B, or even Plan C, but I still think it was a part of a plan.



At this point, Rowling does a fine job of diverting our attention with her "historic" statement that one of the first things she settled upon when she set her world up is that dead is dead. Nobody comes back after having passed through true death. I doubt that even "momentarily dead" would pass muster. Not if "dead" is dead. This isn't Star Trek. Or Buffy.



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But then she's also the one who set up the possibility of faking a death, and had already even given us faked deaths as major plot elements in two of the five earlier books. Indeed, she did this most spectacularly in the book which I (and a great many other people) had been nominating as containing the underlying pattern for the anticipated Book 7.

But the fact is that the whole issue of "dead is dead" is begging the question anyway, since when Rowling set up the Potterverse up she made quite sure that it amply supports the possibility of a very active participation from ghosts.

And, excuse me, but dead is NOT "dead," in the generally accepted Real World sense, if every wizard gets the option of hanging on as a ghost. Her whole statement turns out to be in the way of being a feint.

Just because most ghosts that we have met in the series don't actively participate in Potterverse events, doesn't mean they can't. And Albus Dumbledore has always made his own rules.

Perhaps we ought to take another look at Nearly-Headless Nick's little speech on just why he became a ghost at the end of OotP. We knew when we first read that speech that it had to be very relevant to something. I think we may finally have the proper context in which to examine it.

Nick claims that he became a ghost because he was afraid to move on, and that this is a typical reason for the wizards who manifest as ghosts.

But it's certainly not the only reason. We've also been handed the example of Professor Binns who simply doesn't seem to realize that he is dead. That's another standard traditional reason for manifesting as a ghost.



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We also have Moaning Myrtle who will not turn loose of a grudge, to the point of having had to be forcibly restrained by the Ministry from personally haunting the schoolmates who had once tormented her.

But the absolutely #1 reason in all literature for manifesting as a ghost is that of having unfinished business.

And in any event, in the Potterverse, Acto Nick, you do evidently get a choice.

So, for the moment anyway, I am provisionally going to assume that, yes, we can take Rowling at her word. Albus is dead.

But that he is not necessarily *gone*.

And Tom Riddle certainly isn't in a position to go whining to the Ministry to have a ghostly Albus Dumbledore confined to Hogwarts, the way Olive Hornsby did to Myrtle. Nor does it take a great deal of imagination to think of any number of ways in which a ghostly Albus Dumbledore could prove to be *much* more of a nuisance to Tom Riddle and his aspirations than a live one ever would be. (Be careful what you ask for, Tom.)

I agree that Nick's reasons to become a ghost wouldn't faze Albus. And Albus is much too self-aware not to realize that he is dead. But unfinished business? Oh, yeah. I could see it. I could even see Albus sacrificing his hope of eternal rest in favor of being "neither here nor there" if there was a chance of atoning for the "hugest" mistake he ever made, putting things right, and seeing the former Tom Riddle (whose soul ironically is no longer intact enough to manifest as a ghost) permanently taken out of the world forever.

Or maybe we are simply missing another relevant detail. Hold that thought.



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We've also been hearing about the Draft of Living Death ever since Harry's very first Potions lesson all the way back in Book 1. We've even brewed the stuff now. The references to it could all be set-dressing, or they could be actual hints.

But so far there has been no indication that the Draft of Living Death ever played any active part in the story. Still, when the author keeps bringing the subject up you can't exactly ignore it. Many of us were sure that she had finally put the stuff into play.

Until, of course she informed us that Albus really is dead. So I guess we can dismiss further consideration of the DoLD from this particular essay, anyway.



Which brings us, at long last, to the AK on the tower:

The weak point in any theory is the point at which you feel you have to invent a type of magic which is not already known to be in canon. The minute you have to do that, your theory is probably hosed. Particularly this late in a series.

I seem to have managed to dodge that particular bullet regarding the "modified AK" that I extrapolated back in my original Changeling hypothesis in 2003. The spell that I extrapolated almost certainly does exist in canon. It's even been referred to. But I got the name wrong. It isn't some variety of AK. Possibly the mechanics are off, as well. I can live with that. I didn't properly anticipate the name "Horcrux" either — or the number of them — but I (along with any number of other fans) nailed the concept correctly.



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Well, let me admit that I am very well aware that I may not have all of the relevant details correct in the matter of Dumbledore's murder, either. But I think I may have most of them, and all of the ones I postulate here are at least plausible, even if they later turn out to be incorrect.

(ETA: not that Rowling will ever tell us one way or the other.)

This reading also complies with the underlying rule that the better theories need to be kept simple. Just not obvious. The postulated conspiracy regarding the staged murder of Albus Dumbledore is pretty elaborate, but the concept is straightforward enough. And the more complicated parts of it are strictly in the choreography and the mechanics, and, yes, a few of the motivations. There are a number of different characters involved here, and a lot of different threads in this bundle, and they all have to be accounted for. But everybody's assignment in the production was pretty basic.

And it would be a *big* mistake to try to extrapolate unknown magic here.

Besides, we don't need to.

Rowling has already given us all the pieces we really need in order to account for what we've been shown. We just have to hunt through the rest of the series to find them, sort them out, and put them in the proper order.

Of course, none of this gives us any explanation as to just why we were shown some of the things we were shown. I don't claim to have *all* the answers.



But, in any case:

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Snape hit Albus squarely in the chest with an AK. By this time Harry had already seen a number of AKs thrown at Albus Dumbledore in the course of the duel in the Atrium a year earlier. He'd had a few thrown at himself by that time as well. This one looked exactly the same. I contend that it was absolutely genuine. It had to be. Otherwise Snape was flirting with the 3rd clause of that Vow.

But we had never before watched an AK throw its victim up into the air.

It's *not* a levitation spell.

It didn't do that with the spider. It didn't do that with Frank Bryce. We don't know for sure about Cedric Diggory, since Harry had his eyes tight shut at the time, and didn't watch. But it certainly didn't sound like it did.

And, allow me to say right now that there is NO SUPPORT in canon for the notion that you can invoke one spell and perform another. Snape did NOT say "Avada Kedavra" and *mean* "Levycorpus." He cast an AK. He might have followed it up with a nonverbal levitation spell, but he cast an AK first. And we saw it hit Albus squarely in the chest.

We also already know that the much-ballyhooed "unblockability" of an AK basically just means that there is no known counter-curse, and that no sort of magical shield spells will stop one. Harry managed to block one once, anyway, due to a fluke of timing and the fact that he and his opponent were using "brother" wands. Solid inanimate objects also will stop one just fine, too. We've watched them do it.

Inanimate objects get knocked about and take damage from rather a lot of spells, since nearly all magic designed to affect

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living creatures seems to translate into crude physical force when it hits something that isn't alive, but they do keep the spell from getting past.

So, are we perhaps supposed to conclude that by the time the AK actually hit him, Albus was already an *inanimate object*? Did the green potion (if he was the one to drink it) foul their timing up by reacting badly with the Elixir of Life (or the Felix, which I still think was a factor). Did Snape *barely* get his AK in on time for it to have read as a murder? I'm inclined to think that this is a very strong possibility.

And when the magic of Snape's AK translated into physical force upon hitting a dead body, i.e., an *inanimate object*, was it the crude physical force of the blow that actually threw Albus off of the tower?

Is my original interpretation of what happened on top of that tower the correct one after all? That Albus died of the potion? That it was *Harry* who actually killed him?

Or did the green Potion perhaps unravel the last of the immortality granted by the Elixir of Life until the curse that blasted his hand resumed its progress and it was Tom Riddle who killed him after all?

Was it Riddle's DADA. jinx that finally got him?



Another possible explanation which I have stumbled over at 2nd-hand is that the physical force of an AK reflects the level of power the wizard puts into it, as amplified by the emotional state of the wizard at the time he casts it.

That could also work. Maybe.

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It is worth keeping in the back of one's mind.

Killing the spider was a classroom exercise. Crouch/Moody would not have needed to put much power behind it.

BabyMort was not really altogether on the physical plane yet. He was also exhausted from the return to England. He may not have had much power to put behind an AK, although it was certainly sufficient to kill Frank Bryce.

Wormtail was fully functioning, and he was nervous. I still don't think his AK threw Cedric into the air. But I do think it may have knocked him over, rather than just made him drop.

Well, we know that Snape is a powerful wizard. And we have reason to suspect that he is high-strung to begin with. He was certainly keyed up on that particular evening, too. That AK may have packed quite a punch.

I suppose that it is possible.

It's about the closest thing to an explanation we have. Or are likely to get. The angle of attack is still all wrong for the trajectory described. But then I doubt Rowling is any better at the principles of engineering than she is at genetics.



But, also, as soon as you look at that whole sequence from the viewpoint of "what happened is what was *meant* to happen" then the fall from the tower must have been a part of the plan as well. For some reason, it must have been considered necessary for them to get the body out of sight for a critical few minutes. And the way they managed it was fishy as all get-out.

But if the fall from the tower was a part of the plan, then whatever intensity of AK Snape hit Albus with had to have

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enough magical force behind it to translate into sufficient physical force to knock Albus off his feet, and off the tower as well. Albus may have even cast a weight reduction charm upon himself during the flight back to the castle to more easily facilitate it. That might explain the “slow falling” at any rate.

From rereading the order in which the components of Albus’s murder and the fall from the tower appeared to take place, in the quote back in part I of these essays; the AK — which was genuine, even if not “powerful” — blasted Dumbledore into the air, (which was required) and then Snape (or somebody) seems to have caught him non-verbally — which was that split second when he seemed to hang suspended under the Dark mark — and then one of them nonverbally cast another spell to slow the fall so that he seemed to “fall slowly” past the battlements.

Well, we’ve already encountered a “slow falling” charm available for their use. Albus cast it on Harry when he fell off his broom in a Quidditch match. It was during the match where Harry passed out from the Dementors swarming the stadium in PoA, in fact. Harry landed basically unhurt, although he probably didn’t fall anywhere near as far as Albus did.

And we have no idea why the “conspirators” must have felt that all this was necessary.

Or do we? Was getting the body out of the way necessary in order to make sure that there would be no witnesses if a hoped-for ghost managed to manifest? They couldn’t have known how much control they would have over that.

Did they need to get the body out of the way in order to search it for the locket which needed to be given to Harry? Or for any other items that they did not want someone not

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involved in the conspiracy to find?

Was making him “fall slowly” a mark of respect?

While we are at it, when Malfoy disarmed Dumbledore Harry saw Albus’s wand fly over the battlements. Ergo: if the death had been faked, the wand was on the ground at the foot of the tower, waiting for him. But, of course Rowling assures us that the death was not faked.

Or, rather, she assures us that Albus is most sincerely dead.

But in any case, it’s small wonder Dumbledore petrified Harry so he would witness the murder (they may have needed a witness who would remain at the castle) but couldn’t mix in. His mixing in would probably have been disastrous.



And while we are on the subject: Yes, it is Snape who almost certainly was also the one to remove the Petrificus from Harry once he knew it was safe to do so.

Petrificus Totalus doesn’t have to be lifted by the person who cast it.

Petrificus Totalus is something you learn in First year. It responds to a simple Finite Incantatum — as well as any number of other canceling charms. Harry was barking up entirely the wrong tree when he convinced himself that only the death of Albus Dumbledore could have freed him from the Petrificus. We know better than that. And so does he.

And besides, Albus’s death demonstrably *didn’t* free him.

AK kills instantly.

We saw it kill the spider. We know it killed Cedric as soon as it hit him. Cedric was not “dying” when Harry finally managed

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to open his eyes. He was dead. He was probably dead before Harry heard him hit the ground.

Snape's AK hit Albus Dumbledore squarely in the chest, and blasted his corpse into the air and over the battlements to fall to the bottom of the tower.

And Harry was still petrified. He could not move. He could not scream (although he would have in reaction, if he had been able to). He had to stand there silent and immobile and watch it happen.

He only definitely unfroze once Snape had disappeared into the stairwell. At which point he suddenly realized that he could move again. Rowling was very careful to make it quite unclear as to just exactly when Harry unfroze. He only realized that he could move after everyone but Brutal-Face had left the tower. But he was definitely still frozen when Albus hit the ground.

It is obvious that Harry isn't thinking at all clearly. And just in case we missed the point, Tonks had already released Harry from Draco's Petrificus back on the Hogwarts Express at the beginning of the school year. The canceling spell Tonks used produced a flash of red light. She used something other than a standard Finite Incantatum, probably because Harry couldn't tell her what she was supposed to be canceling (which may be a hint, you know). A plain-vanilla Finite Incantatum does not produce pyrotechnic effects, but it will cancel a Petrificus.

The caster's death, however, didn't.

Not this time anyway. Maybe it's *supposed* to.

So, why ever might it not have worked...?



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Well, there was one moment; when Snape first burst onto the top of the tower, wand in hand, and did a sweep of the whole area, before one of the DEs spoke up and Albus made his first plea, during which Snape could have probably added a 2nd, nonverbal petrificus on top of Albus's. That way if Albus's petrificus was dispersed by his death, Snape's would have held until it was safe to lift it. But, for that, Snape would need to be able to see through an invisibility cloak, or at least to know in advance where the boy was. We have some suggestion that Albus could see through Harry's cloak, but there are no such suggestions in canon regarding Snape. (Although that would have certainly been convenient when Snape helped Filch herd the boy, in his cloak, into the room containing the Mirror of Erised back in PS/SS.) Even though it might be possible to speculate that Legilimency on a high enough order might trump invisibility cloaks, that particular line of inquiry is likely to be fruitless.

However, we definitely have already watched Snape perform a general "area" cancellation charm which nullified *all* of the spells within a given radius. He used it way back in the chapter on the dueling club in CoS. He wouldn't have even needed to know Harry's exact location in order to release him. He only needed to know that Harry was there. And if this was a staged performance, then he certainly knew that Harry was there, since Harry hadn't shown up to give him his cue. There were also two brooms lying about and Albus would have told Snape that he was taking Harry out of the castle while waiting for Harry to show up in response to his summons. And Snape certainly knows about the boy's damned cloak.

For the record, I am more inclined to suspect that the confu-

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sion over the Petrificus is either a deliberate piece of authorial misdirection or absent-mindedness, not a new piece of information about how magic works. Rowling has already amply shown us how **this particular** bit of magic works. It *doesn't* work the way Harry is suddenly trying to convince us (and himself) that it does.



And, finally, as of December 20, 2006 a correspondent finally asked me the right question to jog this picture into focus.

Magic in the Potterverse, seems to operate very much like working in a sophisticated computer application like Photoshop. There is virtually always more than one way by which one can produce the same final effect. We know off the top of our heads of at least three different cleaning charms. And the very fact that Severus Snape could fill the margins of a textbook with notes for homemade spells that all worked before he was out of his teens suggests that Magic itself is really pretty fluid. And we can see for ourselves that spellhacking isn't that unusual.

The Marauders adapted and modified all sorts of charms. The twins do it all the time. Hermione has once or twice too. This isn't inventing magic. It is customizing it.

So maybe we are still asking the wrong question. Maybe, in view of the fuzzy timing of Albus's presumed death, we ought not to be asking whether Snape's AK was a real AK, but whether Albus's Petrificus was a real Petrificus.

We didn't hear it cast. The door burst open and Malfoy yelled Expelliarmus! And Harry momentarily wondered why he couldn't move, because Expelliarmus isn't a freezing charm.



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It acted like a Petrificus. As noted above, Harry had already been put under Petrificus once before in this book and this one felt just the same.

Mightn't Albus have used some other freezing spell instead? Hell, mightn't he have adapted one to hold Harry still until it was lifted by an actual counterspell without reference to the caster at all. For a wizard of his stature it can't have been that difficult.

Leaving it up to Snape to gauge when it was safe to lift the spell and release Harry.



And then, finally, Snape had to chivvy the DEs out of the castle.

He couldn't hang around and find out whether the whole plan had worked.

Small wonder he was so overwrought by the time Harry caught up to him down at the main gates and tried to fight him.

And for Potter to be trying to fight him was just the icing on that evening's cake.

Snape must have been on tenterhooks as to whether or not their plan had really gone off as intended until Albus's message reached him the day of the funeral, and put his mind at rest. I mean, really! If you accept the premise that it was a conspiracy to stage a murder, and you can't stay to find out whether or not it went as planned... it's small wonder a control freak like Snape was in such a state.

It was pointed out, over on the Tea at Spinner's End board (now gone, more's the pity), that just about all of the thugs



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that Malfoy smuggled into the Castle who were at liberty to do so, had a go at attacking Harry during the escape-and-pursuit down to the main gates. Fenrir tackled him, knocked him down, and would have savaged him. The Carrows hexed him from behind. The “Big Blond” even hit him with Cruciatus (I originally thought this was probably the elder Goyle, He and the elder Crabbe were identified as the largest of the DEs at the graveyard assembly two years before, if you remember, and Crabbe was swept up with the rest of the trash in the raid on the DoM the previous June. But no, he was someone named Rowle). And Snape put a stop to it all with the exhortation to remember their orders, that Potter belonged to the Dark Lord. Before he Apparated away, pursued by a hippogriff.

After first giving the boy a last dueling lesson, and then turning him over to Hagrid.



And, right about now, maybe we ought to go back and question whether it really was Neville who petrified Greyback after all.

Neville was about the only one of the defenders who was in a position to do so. Everyone else was engaged in one-on-one battles by the time Harry scrambled out from under Greyback's petrified body, and they weren't likely to have been in any position to have been watching out for Harry a moment earlier. Particularly since from the defenders' point of view the battle had been ongoing for some time, their enemies had just got reinforcements, and none of them even knew that Harry was in the castle. Neville was down, having been injured earlier in the melee, but he was still armed and still conscious.



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The order in which the raiding party started down from the tower was: Malfoy, Greyback, the brother-sister act (the Carrows, who by this time really put one strongly in mind of a pair of overexcited pugs), Snape, and, finally, Brutal-Face.

Harry had already petrified Brutal-Face at the top of the stairway. The defenders let Malfoy and Snape through the pack.

As soon as he emerged from the stairwell, Harry caught a glimpse of Snape whipping around the corner at the end of the hall, when Greyback broke away from another fight and tackled him. Somebody immediately petrified Greyback, and Harry scrambled up to find that everyone but Neville was engaged in a one-on-one battle. He mixed in and once three of the invaders broke away and the hall cleared a bit, he pursued them.

So. Okay. Harry heard the “Petrificus Totalus!” which got Greyback. It was cast verbally. Which argues pretty strongly in favor of it having indeed been Neville who cast it.

On the other hand, if Snape and Albus had been in cahoots since Harry was in diapers, Snape knew exactly how important Harry is to the ongoing mission to take out Voldemort, and he knows that Harry is right behind him, about to run straight into a clutch of Voldemort's most vicious fighters.

Tonks says she heard Snape shout something although she couldn't be sure of what. It could have just been the “It's over! Time to go!” announcement. Or, possibly not.

It would have looked highly suspicious for Snape to hold back in his “retreat” while he was still in the hallway among the castle defenders, but, how do we know that he did not whip around that corner, urge Malfoy on, and, in his character as “Leader,” take one last look, and, just maybe, fire off one last



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hex into the mob?

After all, we know what Snape thinks of werewolves.

And to take out their leader would be an efficient use of the opportunity.

But, I think the only way we are going to find out the truth will be if Harry tries to discover who saved him in order to thank them, and none of the defenders will admit to it. Given the frequency with which we've ever heard Harry actually express his gratitude to the people who keep saving his bacon, I'd give the subject about a 20% chance of ever coming up at all.

Snape definitely put a stop to the Big Blond's Cruciatus with the exhortation that Potter belonged to the Dark Lord. Snape had certainly not mentioned any orders to the effect of Potter "belonging" to the Dark Lord the summer before at Spinner's End, and even Bellatrix would have regarded such a justification as inarguable.

So either this was a more recent order which was given since the face-off in Snape's sitting room, (quite possible, since that meeting took place nearly a full year earlier) or Snape improvised, on the spur of the moment, knowing that it would almost certainly be accepted — since it chimed in tune with the orders from the previous year, when everyone was to leave Potter alone until Voldemort had heard the whole Prophecy. He was taking a risk that none of these clowns will mention that "reminder" in Voldemort's hearing, but I think he may have second-guessed the Dark Lord's wishes in any case. Or, that may have *been* their orders. Or, at least, *his* orders.



Exeunt Albus: Showtime!

Which brings us around to those possible "silent partner(s)" in the conspiracy to stage Albus's murder.

There are several candidates.

There was probably at least one more active participant, even though not necessarily one who was fully informed. I, for one, am not at all convinced that the DEs put any barriers on that staircase. Nor have we ever heard of magical barriers which can be demolished by a stray hex. Magical barriers are designed to *repel* hexes. And falling masonry, too. You need a specific counter-spell to demolish a magical barrier.

And, consider, just whose purpose did that barrier really serve? Would the DEs have cared if the battle followed them up to the top of the tower?

But *Albus* would care. The *last* thing he would want would be for his staff or the Order to start messing with the staging of his murder. (Particularly with Harry possibly stuck in the middle of it, invisible and immobilized and unable to get out of the way of a melee.)

I think we've got another Book 6 = Book 2 moment here.

After all, we watched Dobby pull exactly the same "throw him through the air" number on Lucius Malfoy at the end of CoS, didn't we? On a *staircase*, too, thank you very much. Dobby had invited himself along to the final face-off (just the way Greyback did?) and played a very active part in the resolution of book 2. I think he may have done it again in book 6. This time under orders.

After all, the mark of a good House Elf is that he isn't seen, unless he chooses to be.

I think Albus sent Harry off to "get his cloak," and then he



Exeunt Albus: Showtime!

summoned Dobby and asked him to monitor the staircase.

Dobby wasn't really a party to the events going on up on the top of the tower. He was just standing guard at the bottom of the staircase and keeping the staff, the kids, and the Order members from getting up the stairs. Albus absolutely did NOT want them messing with his murder. And I don't think he'd have left that kind of thing to chance if he didn't have to. And he didn't have to. He could call on Dobby, who he personally employs, and Dobby trusts the Headmaster.

And that goes double and in spades if Swythiv is right, and Albus hadn't hired Dobby as a Hogwarts elf, three years earlier, but as his *personal* elf.

So Dobby had his orders: let Malfoy and the DEs go up to the top of the tower. Keep everyone else out, until Professor Snape comes and takes the DEs away. And Dobby would have happily spent all night keeping people out if it had been necessary.

So much for curse-breaking masonry.

Once Snape went up the stairs, and started herding the DEs back down, Dobby's job was done and he went back to his quarters.



And Fawkes, who could Apparate to London on a nano-second's notice to eat an AK on Dumbledore's behalf the year before, this year can't be arsed to haul his tail feathers to the top of a tower of the same castle? Oh puh-leeze. This event was just SO planned...



Exeunt Albus: Showtime!

There has to have been at least one more member of the cast, however. Unless Albus has his staff so well trained that he could leave them to wrap the matter up without any direction at all. And that sounds a bit out of character from what we know of Albus. By the end of the evening the plan was that Albus would be dead and Snape would be gone. Somebody else was going to have to wrap the business up in a tidy bow, and to arrange for a nice gaudy, conspicuous funeral so Voldemort will be certain to get the message that he has won this round.

Minerva is the most likely suspect for arranging the funeral, of course. She had the authority to make all of the arrangements. And she was also the one who sent Flitwick to fetch Snape — and was able to tell Flitwick exactly where to find him, too. But Minerva's reaction when she learned of Dumbledore's death (or, more specifically, that Snape had murdered him) would have been hard to fake, and she hasn't ever been set up as being any kind of an actress. She nearly fainted.

And could Snape and Albus really have kept Hagrid out of it? I really, truly doubt it. This was a "Dumbledore's men" production all the way. With Snape (as usual) cast as the villain, Harry as witness, and Hagrid as chief mourner.

And Hagrid is the one — the only one — who is known to have actually dealt with the body. He carried it into the castle and laid it out, probably in Dumbledore's own rooms. And later carried the corpse, wrapped in its pall to the place of internment.

And of course no one could possibly have cast any doubts upon the "legitimacy" of the circumstances, in the face of such profound grief as Hagrid's, could they? Hagrid is virtually incapable of dissembling, isn't he?

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Well, yes. I'm sure that everyone involved in the plot was counting on that widespread assumption, too.

But, contrary to most appearances, Hagrid can keep a secret. He sometimes blurts what is at the top of his mind, but he only blurts among people he trusts; those he is confident are all on the same side that he is. He has never, not even once, whatever the provocation, let anything indiscreet slip out in the presence of, say, Malfoy. He's a bit like Snape, in that regard. I very much doubt that Snape has ever thrown one of his monumental hissy fits among his fellow Death Eaters.

For example: what would you be willing to wager against the probability that Hagrid has known the identity of the barman at the Hog's Head ever since he was expelled and joined Hogwarts' staff? And in what must be something like 50 years, if not longer, in all that time Hagrid has never even dropped a hint?

Of course Hagrid is aware that he tends to blurt. And he trusts Dumbledore absolutely. He would not have insisted upon knowing the full details of the plot. What he knew, if anything, is that Voldemort wants Dumbledore dead, and that Dumbledore is going to *do something*.

Hagrid doesn't know what, he doesn't know how, he doesn't know when, and he certainly does not know that Snape is going to be the one to kill him.

And Albus didn't have Hagrid patrolling the halls with the Order members. Hagrid was off in his hut tending some injured bowtruckles. He didn't even see the Dark mark floating above the castle. Nothing brought him out of his hut until he heard Harry screaming when the Big Blond hit him with Cruciatus.

But when you step back and take a hard look, it seems rather

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interesting to reflect that whereas in PoA Hagrid was fulminating over the perfidious Sirius Black and growling that if he got his hands on him he would rip him "limb from limb," he makes no such vengeful statements directed at Severus Snape. Indeed his statement that Dumbledore "must have told Snape to go with them Death Eaters" now sounds suspiciously like one of our regulation Hagridian blurts.

And, later in the evening, when all voices are raised in vilification of Severus Snape, we notice that Hagrid's voice is conspicuously absent from the chorus. Indeed I cannot think of any point in the entire six (now seven) books where Hagrid has *ever* uttered a single word against Severus Snape. And it's certainly not from a general unwillingness to speak ill of anybody. Hagrid gets very nasty about Slytherins in general. He's about the only adult character in the series who does.

But he never does it about Snape.

And by the time he shows up in the hospital wing he is in such a flood of tears that it deflects any impulse to question him. He remains behind this barrier of tears all through the funeral as well.



And last, but hardly least, we may have one final backstage helper in this production as well.

The Props Manager.

Here I am slightly less sure of what is going on. The whole business could be exactly what it appears.

But it really does seem just a *bit* much to expect us all to assume that after micro-managing the affair practically all the

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way to the final curtain call, that the conspirators should then just all sit back and leave it up to chance to get the false Horcrux out of Albus's pocket and see it passed on to Harry.

A fat lot of good it would have done anybody if left in Albus's pocket for Minerva to find! But isn't it a bit late in the evening to be introducing another totally random element to the proceedings?

I mean, we already got our standard allotment of randomness for this book with Trelawney blundering into the Room of Hidden Things just at the moment she did.

So let's look at the situation: Harry and Hagrid approach the crowd of Hufflepuffs that was gathering around something at the base of the tower. (And why were they gathering *there*, when Hagrid's hut was blazing merrily away in plain sight? Why aren't they coming to assist Hagrid with the fire?) There is a gap in the crowd for Harry to get through. And there Harry sees Albus lying on the ground, spread-eagle, his glasses askew, a trickle of blood from his mouth.

Harry does not actually see a locket at all. He only discovers it a moment later because he managed to kneel on it.

Somehow, my attention manages to snag on what surely must be the most irrelevant detail in that whole description.

Why the blood?

Corpses don't bleed, properly speaking. Their hearts are no longer pumping blood at the pressure needed to force it out through just any old break in the circulatory system. Their hearts are no longer pumping blood at all. So it shouldn't leak. Not unless it is a large break. Or unless it is getting some help from the force of gravity. But Albus was lying face up. And

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he had fallen *slowly*. He wouldn't have hit the ground at full force. And any damage would have been to his back, not anything that would have produced an artistic little trickle of blood from his mouth.

Neither an AK nor the green potion are likely to have made him bleed.

But we have seen blood used "artistically" in this manner before, haven't we?

Dragon's blood. A little dusty now, but possibly still "useful."

It isn't particularly difficult to draft out a script wherein Slughorn (Mr death-scenes-tableaux on a 2-minute notice, a specialty) was waiting at the base of the tower to catch the body as it fell. He would have set up the scene, arranged the body, (welcomed the ghost, if it manifested) made sure the robes were decently covering Albus's skinny old legs, and taken the false Horcrux out of the pocket, possibly gotten it open. Then he would have lurked until the crowd showed up (pretending to be a bush?), mingled in with the Hufflepuffs, and when Harry approached the body Sluggy would have conjured the locket into position for him to kneel on it.

No, not difficult to imagine at all. I'm just not totally convinced it happened.

I do know that if it anything like it *did* happen the Props Manager *would* have been Slughorn. He would have been glad to do it too. It would have given him a perfect reason to be out of the castle while the DEs were invading it.

Horace Slughorn is an incorrigible old showman. But I think that Albus appreciated a good show. And they worked very well together. Horace had already passed the Potions's book,

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another critically important prop, to Harry earlier in the year. And I'm fairly sure that was at Albus's prompting, too. And apart from possibly Snape, Slughorn is the only member of the staff who has any inkling of their Horcrux problem. So it is not all that much of a stretch.

Although I do think he overplayed his hand a bit with that trickle of blood.



I really did expect the school to remain closed for the coming year. Or at least for the Autumn term. But I knew that it would not be empty. At the very least, Hagrid, who is remaining at Hogwarts regardless, would have to move indoors, since his hut is uninhabitable. The castle is Trelawney's home as well. To say nothing of the House Elves'. And, these days, Firenze. Probably Filch as well.

And by the time the students board the Hogwarts Express to return to London (which hadn't happened yet in canon by the end of the book, actually), the rest of the Order of the Phoenix might have known that Albus was still around.

One way or another. Albus was in attendance at his own funeral. He had an important message to send out, after all.

Albus Dumbledore's grand public send-off was a fine bit of communication all round. It sent a loud, obvious message of the end of an era to the Ministry and to the Wizarding world in general.

It sent a loud and clear message to Lord Voldemort, as well.

I was sure that it also sent another, not so loud, somewhat different message to the members of his Order. Nearly all of

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whom, even his brother Aberforth, were in attendance at it.

We know that the members of the Order of the Phoenix communicate with each other by means of their Patroni.

Patroni, as we know, are silver-white. And each one's form is unique.

We're told Albus Dumbledore's Patronus always took the form of a Phoenix.

Harry was sure for a moment that he saw the form of a Phoenix rising joyfully from the white smoke and the (bright, white) funeral fires.

Which disappeared into the blue, perhaps bearing its message to one particular Order member who was *not* at the funeral.

Was this Albus's Patronus? I thought we would find out eventually.

And that the Order all now knew that he may be dead, but he is not gone.

After all, those we love never truly leave us.



And, now for the \$64,000 question:

Why?

Why should Rowling go out of her way to inject such a monumental level of ambiguity into the question of the death of Albus Dumbledore?

Because she clearly put a lot of work into making the whole thing such a masterpiece of confusion and contradiction.

She's the author: she could have written the murder of Albus Dumbledore simply, powerfully, and effectively, and instead she has chosen to make it flashy, melodramatic, and confusing.

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I doubt this was either by accident or through any particular lack of confidence as a writer. (ETA: although by this time I suspect she may have been just too burnt-out to be thinking clearly enough to do anything but try to get to the end.)

As somebody over at Spinner's End pointed out, the whole thing is practically seamless. Every single questionable detail supports two just about equally valid interpretations. One of these supports the reading that Dumbledore is dead, and the other, just as convincingly supports the reading that he isn't. But if she had *wanted* us to suspect that the death may have been faked, why did she go out of her way to deny it a year later?

Unless she just wanted to drop a bomb and keep the public interest high.

For that matter, she directly told us in an earlier interview that Grindelwald was dead too.

Which of course by 2005 he was. But the story had only progressed to 1997 at that point, and in 1997 Grindelwald was still alive and kicking.

Of course the very fact that there is such a stacking order of ambiguous details is in itself highly suspicious. Because if Rowling had wanted the matter to be clear, at the time, there would be no question about it. The AK would have hit him and he would have fallen down dead, and there would be no question. He's dead, Jim. Move on.

Instead, we have the present morass of confusion and contradictions. This end result simply did not happen by accident. Ms Rowling had already shown us that she can be one tricky customer, and she clearly intended for us to be confused. Something is fishy here, and there is more of a twist to this tale

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than we were picking up. I suspected we simply didn't have the proper context for something that really matters.



But then, flashy, melodramatic and confusing isn't exactly an unfamiliar combination with Rowling, is it? I don't think you can get much more confusing than the climax of OotP (which she wouldn't even let us watch).

But I rather think our real parallel here is the last few chapters of GoF. In fact the climax of GoF and the climax of HBP can practically serve as a pair of bookends wherein first Voldemort, and then Dumbledore see to it that Harry he is rendered immobile and silent and then forced to watch as one's servant mutilates himself in order to facilitate his return, and then the other's servant mutilates his soul to facilitate his departure. (One now suddenly wonders whether that mysterious overheard quarrel is supposed to be a companion piece to the discussion in the opening chapter of GoF wherein Pettigrew offers to find some other wizard to serve as a blood donor for Voldemort's return, rather than Harry Potter, and is overborne.)

Nor is that the only possible GoF parallel. There is also the nagging issue as to whether AK throws its victim into the air. Which first seems to have been suggested in GoF. (Although, again, we weren't allowed to watch.)

It doesn't do that in an enclosed space, anyway. Both the spider and Frank Bryce were murdered indoors and they fell where they stood. We were shown that much.

But it turns out that we've got another incredibly screwy account about the behavior of an AK in the murder of Cedric

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Diggory, which we weren't permitted to actually witness.

At the point of the confrontation leading to Cedric's murder, Wormtail had been approaching the two boys (who were standing side by side) in the graveyard. He is stated to have paused next to a towering grave marker "only six feet away" from them, and the three of them stare at one another. Then Harry was hit by a Voldemort-proximity headache, dropped his wand and shut his eyes. Voldemort then gave his order to kill the spare, Harry heard the swish of the wand and Pettigrew's Avada Kedavra, followed by a heavy thump next to him.

He pried his eyes open to see Cedric lying on the ground, next to him, dead. Wormtail then grabbed him, forced him over to that towering grave marker (still only 6 feet away) turned him around shoved him up against the stone, bound him to it and gagged him.

It then states that Harry saw Cedric's body lying "some 20 feet away," with Harry's own wand lying at its feet, and the TriWizard Cup beyond.

Where is a continuity editor when you need one?

Preferably one who can *count*.

Point: Harry heard Cedric fall *next* to him. Not some 14 feet away.

Point: He saw Cedric's body lying *next to him* before Wormtail grabbed him and dragged him over to the monument.

Point: Harry dropped his own wand when the pain of the Voldemort-induced headache blindsided him. He did not toss it across the graveyard.

Point: the wand is *still* lying next to Cedric's body. And yet the six foot distance is suddenly 20 feet.

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This is just plain slipshod writing, and I am not convinced it means anything apart from a love of grandiose-sounding statements that turn out to be hollow, *and* the fact that some editor wasn't on their toes when they ought to have been. We certainly cannot draw any safe conclusions from such a mess of internally inconsistent and self-contradictory data as that. Somebody's editor needs to be smacked.

I am inclined to wonder whether the deliberate confusion of the climax of HBP may be intimately linked to another bit of deliberate confusion earlier in the same book, namely, the "grand contradiction" between Albus and Sybill's conflicting accounts of what really happened the night of the first Prophecy. The first of these incidents marks the beginning of Harry's part in this story arc. The second incident refers back to that beginning and moves us into position for the beginning of the end of the series.

But I can't make it fit.



I was sure that if Rowling held to the sort-of established pattern that she appeared to have set up; wherein the first three books of the series appeared to be being echoed by the last three; we may have already seen the conclusion of the series enacted in proxy form in the climax and conclusion of Book 3: 'HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN'.

Which — time travel notwithstanding — in comparison with the following three books was a masterpiece of clarity.

For that matter, both PS/SS and CoS had nice, clear resolutions as well, comparatively speaking. Even though there was a

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great deal going on in all of them. Rowling can write a satisfactory climax if she really wants to.

The official climax of PoA was the race back through time to save Sirius Black and Buckbeak. In the course of it we got the mass Dementor attack by the lake during which Harry discovers his true “Patron,” his protector, and it turns out to be himself.

But the part of the book that really connects with the reader, the part that sticks in the mind long after finishing it, isn’t so much Harry’s epiphany by the lake, but the confrontation and revelations in the Shrieking Shack.

The whole course of action over the progress of PoA was structured to lead up to that confrontation in the Shack. Pettigrew’s escape and the rescue of Sirius Black (and Buckbeak) feel almost like an afterthought.

If Book 7 is a reflection of PoA there was no way that Rowling is not going to give us a redux of the confrontation in the Shack. It’s just too major an element to omit.

I thought that all through HBP she was “moving furniture” to get her stage set up to throw us all back into the same frame of mind that we were in at the opening of PoA.

She had a much easier job of setting the scene in PoA. She could arbitrarily introduce Sirius Black, who we’d only heard mentioned once before in the whole series, as the enemy without a jot of background. Absolutely nobody questioned the belief that Sirius Black was Harry’s enemy from page 1. Any background information on the matter she fed to us later, in the course of the book.

Sirius Black was the enemy; the first time Harry saw Sirius’s photograph, Harry thought that he looked exactly like a vam-

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pire; he was Voldemort’s second-in-command; he had betrayed Harry and his parents, he had murdered Peter Pettigrew (the Potters’ true friend) — along with a dozen Muggles in front of a whole street of witnesses, and now he was stalking Harry.

And by the time the two came face to face Harry “hated him more than he hated Lord Voldemort.”

Sound familiar, much?

If this is what she is up to — and I was confident that it was — it’s a much more tricky balancing act than she had back in PoA.

Back in PoA we hadn’t anything but the apparent flip-flop of Sirius Black having suddenly gone from being James Potter’s “inseparable” best friend to the official Ministry viewpoint of his being Voldemort’s 2nd-in-command, without anyone ever having suspected a change in his allegiance, to make us suspicious. I mean, really, looked at logically, this fable made absolutely no sense, and not everyone in the wizarding world even bought the story (Madam Rosemerta claims she didn’t, for one). But none of us ever questioned it over the course of the book. We were nowhere near as aware of just how tricky Rowling can be back in 1999.

But this time she has built up six whole books of apparent familiarity with the character that she is now shoving into the Sirius Black role, and while she might misdirect us all over the landscape, she cannot altogether make us forget that we’ve been watching Snape for several years now. She has hedged her bets by holding back all sorts of information about him, and not really giving us much to work from when trying to interpret him or his behavior. But we know even less about Remus Lupin (to say nothing of Peter Pettigrew — which is what Rowling usu-

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ally does), and yet have far fewer suspicions of there being any great mystery about him to solve.

If we are building up to another Shrieking Shack revelation/reversal, then what she did over the course of HBP was to deliberately weight the scales in the opposite direction in order to tear down the confidence that the reader had built up in the character of Severus Snape over the previous 5 books. By this time, the reader is supposed to hate Snape as much as Harry does.

And I suspected that over the course of Book 7 we would be given even more apparent reason to do so.

We would learn more of Snape's history through the lens of any number of 3rd-parties' current biases — now that they believe him to be a traitor, and a murderer, and Lord Voldemort's second-in-command — and the surface reading of this information will not show in Snape's favor.

We will almost certainly get some sort of equivalent to the Three Broomsticks eavesdropping scene complete with information that will sound very bad indeed, but, like that discussion in the Three Broomsticks, will ultimately prove nothing but that people are determined to interpret what they see according to their biases. I suspect that whatever interaction Snape may have had with Lily Evans (if any) could come out during this sequence. It will not do Snape any credit.

But, as of 2006, just to make a tentative prediction: I thought that despite Voldemort (who may be flitting in and out of sight, much as the Grim did in PoA — something of ill-omen will be doing so anyway) and the hunt for the Horcruxes, and the probability that the story is going to be wall-to-wall with Dementors, I was pretty much convinced that Snape's role as a

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fugitive in Book 7 is going to take a fairly central position in it. Book 7 was going to be as much about Severus Snape as PoA was about Sirius Black.

And just what did we finally learn in the Shrieking Shack, last time?

We learned that the enemy we've been dodging all through the book isn't the real enemy. He isn't an enemy at all. He wasn't the traitor. He wasn't the one who betrayed Harry's parents. Or certainly not intentionally — although his actions did contribute to that betrayal. And he has been trying all along to protect Harry, not kill him.

The real traitor was someone else altogether, someone that nobody ever suspected. Someone whom everyone had trusted. Someone everyone believed to have been foully murdered — by Sirius, before multiple witnesses. And it was that murder, not the betrayal of the Potters, which has made him a fugitive.

Sound familiar?

Which means that we older fans who for some years have been convinced that Peter Pettigrew was going to prove to be monumentally significant to the resolution of the series may have been just a bit off-target.

Oh, sure, Peter may be awarded his little Gryffindor moment, and probably will go out in a teensy blaze of glory. In any event, he's toast. But it isn't Peter Pettigrew himself which is going to prove significant to the big picture, it is his former *rôle*.

And in the final reckoning, Albus Dumbledore will be playing that role.



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Let me explain myself.

In this pair of essays, I have been trying to project the final conclusion of the story arc according to what I interpreted as the underlying pattern to the series as it had already played out up to the end of HBP. And Snape being “Dumbledore’s man” fits that pattern better than any other alternate interpretation.

Indeed this is a major component of the pattern that I see. If Snape is not Dumbledore’s man, then I have misinterpreted the whole pattern of the series. I admit that I may have done exactly that. But I do not think I have.

So I have a good deal invested in this interpretation, and to this point I simply do not see anything which significantly contradicts it, or that would force me to question my basic reading of the series.

I may turn out to have been taking another scenic cruise down the Martian canals, but I am discerning a pattern here. And I see too many indications that the pattern really is there to be able to dismiss the “Snape is Dumbledore’s man” component of it any more than I can dismiss all of the indications that Harry is the final Horcrux.

The most prominent indication of this pattern that I am seeing at the moment is that — based upon the last two books and their echoes and reflections of the first two books — I AM CONVINCED that we are being set up to watch Book 7 echo and reflect major elements, and indeed the primary thrust of PoA. And the events over the course of HBP have conspired to put Severus Snape into the position of stepping directly into the role previously played by Sirius Black. I mean, really, as of HBP can anyone claim that Snape’s position right now in the story arc, is significantly different from Black’s position at the opening of PoA?

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The “great revelation” of PoA was that — all previous indications notwithstanding — Sirius Black was NOT the traitor. He was NOT the enemy. He was trying to PROTECT Harry, not to kill him. The “traitor” was someone whom *everyone* had trusted and who was believed to have died at Black’s hand.

I am confident that this much of the pattern will repeat in Book 7.

Ergo: Snape is Dumbledore’s man. Dumbledore has not had his final word yet. And it was Dumbledore who deliberately allowed the partial Prophecy to escape. Thereby setting in play this whole story cycle. And, by doing so, he betrayed everything he stood for.



But about that death.

By the release of DHs, I’d had a couple of years to think about the death of Albus Dumbledore and a couple of additional side issues had occurred to me regarding the established traditions pertaining to the deaths of great wizards as they are presented in literature and folklore.

I was not sure that such traditions are something that we can really afford to overlook. Even if Rowling, in the end, chose not to mimic them.

Merlin, Gandalf, whoever (although those two are the ones most built to the established tradition, Tolkein was following a template far older than he was):

Their “official deaths” all seem to have something in common. They don’t leave bodies.

Usually nobody actually sees them die. Or, not and have them stay dead, anyway.

And they definitely don’t leave tombs where, over the next

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couple of hundred years, somebody's bound to get the bright idea to break into it and steal the bones.

Instead, they usually just disappear.

Generally in some manner shrouded in Mystery.

Which makes Dumbledore's death — and even more to the point, his funeral — very, very unusual when regarded in a traditional context.

And even more convinced me that Albus just wasn't in that white tomb.

Even if he was dead.

What strikes me as being most in character for the death, or perhaps I ought to say the departure, of a Great Wizard, would be for him to reappear briefly **after** the hero has completed his great task, and to take a highly visible part in mopping up the stray odds and ends and seeing to it that justice is done to all of the active participants —

[Which in this case is an absolutely necessary function if any kind of justice is to *be* done. If Snape and Albus have been in cahoots since Harry was a baby, then Snape has never really acted independently, and he has nothing left to atone for, apart from a nasty disposition; and yet he has always been required to play the villain in public. Things cannot help but to look very black indeed for him without Albus to Explain It All]

— and then to slip away quietly without fanfare. Typically in some mysterious manner leaving people to make up their own explanations and probably spin some “goofy legend” that if the need were ever great enough he might come back.

What Dumbledore actually got was your boilerplate Hero's send-off, or more accurately, the tribute to a great King.



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You can just about rationalize this on the grounds that he was allegedly one of “yesterday's heroes,” and he was set up as being very close to the uncrowned King of wizarding Britain. But he wasn't serving the function of a “hero” in the story. Or that of a King. He was serving the function of the “wise old wizard.”

So for all that his funeral was very moving, I'm not sure it really fits.

I mean, wouldn't you say that it was rather *overdone*?

What would fit the traditional template (and Rowling's established pattern) would be first; for Harry and his allies to settle Voldemort; and THEN Albus would make his final appearance, do his usual debriefing, make sure that no one is going to suffer for their actions in the war who doesn't deserve to, and then to quietly slip away from the resulting celebration and step through the Veil.

I mean, we all know that eventually we are going to be getting back to that room with the Veil. We knew that as soon as Rowling introduced it.

Indeed, what would fit the template very well, would be for Albus (or Ghostly!Albus) to make his rather subtle personal farewells to various individuals, in the course of circulating at some crowded, overblown Ministry wrap-up, and for Harry to lose sight of him, suddenly realize what Albus has done and race down into the Department of Mysteries too late to see anything but the Veil still fluttering in the breeze of his passing.

And if the pattern holds, it may be Snape who keeps Harry from following. Although it is possible that he may follow Albus, himself.

In which case it would be Hagrid who reminds Harry that he still has friends who would grieve if he should run off before his time.



Exeunt Albus: Showtime!



However:

It seems that I have turned out to have been very laggard about directing my attention to GoF as a source of potentially relevant patterns.

There that book is; sitting plopped in the middle of the series, huge and intractable with no scheduled “partner book” to balance it. Various details from it have shown up on our radar as having recurred, or having been recurrences, but very little attempt has been made to mine it for patterns.

I think that this may turn out to have been a mistake.

One thing that boggles me is that even at the end of the series there are still people out there who have managed to convince themselves that the character of Severus Snape is secondary to almost any teenage character in the books. “These are CHILDREN’S books! The story is about the kids!” they earnestly exhort us.

It should be obvious by this time, that there are only four “cardinal” characters in this story. Those four characters are Albus, Tom, Severus and Harry. EVERYBODY else is a secondary character.

And, no, the story is not about “the kids.” It is “about” Harry. Ron and Hermione are NOT Harry.

The story is not about them.

Actually, my own instinct is to suspect that the whole shindig is really all “about” Tom Riddle.

The villain, after all, IS the story.

Harry only got swept up into this circus at random, as a direct

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result of Tom’s own determination to regard himself as “special.”

The Prophecy demons tossed a card upon the table. Albus had no better sense than to pick it up and put it into play, Snape passed it to Tom, and Tom pulled Harry into the equation by trying to use it for a trump. It could just as easily have been Neville. It probably almost was.

That’s the *point*.

From that day on, all three of the other cardinal characters have made their contributions toward equipping Harry for that final confrontation and the resolution of the Prophecy demons’ gambit. Tom unknowing, Snape unwilling, and Albus in gruesome, but ultimately willing service to the requirements.

But the base element of this particular hell brew was baby Harry.

Who, in essence, it turns out is not special at all.

You could even call it an echo, or perhaps a foreshadowing of Tom’s rebirthing ritual from the stone cauldron if you wanted to.

I’m rather afraid that I must.



And, speaking of echoes:

I suddenly realize that I have also been appallingly laggard concerning another GoF-related detail, as well.

I have been ignoring a whole additional component of our continuum between the living and the dead.

Those echoes.

At the climax of GoF we were shown the echoes of Tom Riddle’s (and Peter Pettigrew’s) last five victims. Cedric, Frank, Bertha, Lily, and James.

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What were they, really? They were all dead people, but they were not ghosts. According to Nearly-Headless Nick, Frank Bryce, as a Muggle, wouldn't have been capable of manifesting as a ghost. And every one of them had already passed through the veil.

But somehow they knew about the two-way portkey?

That doesn't make any kind of sense. Actually it smells like balogneum to me. But we all accepted it at the time.

So, okay then. What else might they have known?

Their time in the material world was limited, but it was long enough for them to pass critical information.

Once the penny finally dropped, I suspected that the probability that somehow Albus will once again manage to Explain It All to us at the end of the adventure had just risen to nearly a certainty.

The *Priori Incantatum* that those particular echoes were generated by was based upon the fact that Harry and Tom happened to be using brother wands and had cast spells at one another at the very same time. This is a peculiarity about wands and wand cores which would apply to only a very few cases where one wizard attempts to duel with another. Although the phenomenon has probably been known for centuries. At least to wand-crafters.

But *Priori Incantatum* is also a spell, as well as an effect. Amos Diggory had used it to replay the casting of the Dark mark from Harry's wand all the way back in the disturbance during the World Cup. And a spell can be deployed at any time, by anyone who knows it.

So, just maybe the fans who have been insisting that Albus would not ever agree to become a ghost are absolutely right.

He might, however, very well have planned to leave an echo.

Exeunt Albus: Showtime!

Which would — right there — put paid to any suggestion that whatever took place on top of the tower was in even the least degree accidental, or a result of a failure of communication. As well as dismissing the suggestion that he and Snape would have been willing to permit anyone BUT Snape to be the one to kill him. Or that Albus should have been allowed to die by any means *other* than the AK curse. Poisoning would not generate such an echo. Neither would whatever curse on the Ring had blasted his hand.

To invoke an echo, you need to replay a spell that kills.

And in order to have Albus's echo Explain It All to us dictates the necessity for Snape, or at any rate, for the wand he used, to survive to the end of the adventure.

Echoes of the dead are something that we have not yet had explained to us in any kind of detail in canon, and Rowling very carefully defined them in what now sounds like a deliberately dismissive manner back when the fans were trying to convince themselves that Harry had somehow seen the ghosts of his parents in the graveyard of Little Hangleton.

But there is still a lot that we do not know about the matters concerning wand echoes, or, come to that, *Priori Incantatum* itself.

For starters: how often can a *Priori Incantatum* be used to retrieve the echo of a specific spell?

Which raises the rather interesting question of; if Snape used a spare wand to kill Albus, and has set it aside so the AK will not be buried in a year's additional spells, is he now, in effect, carrying Albus's echo around like a genie in a bottle?

Regarding the Potterverse Part II

Missed Opportunities

Matters where I truly believe that with only a *slightly* different handling (and perhaps a stronger grasp on the basic concept of numbers) we would have had something that played out rather better than what we got in canon.



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This essay was a late addition to the collection, only uploaded years after the closing of the official canon.

Like I’ve said elsewhere, I think I’m reasonably sharp. But sometimes I’m just not too swift.



You really have to hand it to the Prophecy demons. They are GOOD at their job. They stitched Tom Riddle up in a sack and made a zip-damned fool of Albus Dumbledore.

(And, finally, some eight years after the fact, I at long last realized that they also assured the death of Severus Snape for being such an fool as to try to curry favor by reporting the damned thing. The only person to escape their attentions was Aberforth — who may not have even heard it, and ignored it if he did — and, of course, Trelawney herself. The Prophecy demons have every reason to be expected to preserve their own instrument.)

Plus, it was seven years and counting after the closure of canon when I wrote the first iteration of any of this, and most of us still hadn’t figured out just where the catch was hiding. Mainly because it *wasn’t* hidden. The catch was sitting right out there in plain sight.

Yes, of course there was a catch. There’s *always* a catch to a Prophecy.

Even given that this “Prophecy” manifestly **didn’t** play out the way the text of the Prophecy *claimed* that it was supposed to — or not if you believe Harry Potter’s account of it, anyway. But we still couldn’t identify the *part* that was a cheat. Or



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rather, the way of it that was a cheat.

Because the Prophecy demons always *cheat*, too.

We’d caught a lot of the other “true lies” related to that prophecy. We saw for ourselves that it wasn’t that neither Tom nor Harry could *live*, but that neither could properly *die* until the Harrycrux was disposed of. We had it paraded right under our noses that Harry’s power to form, or attract, human attachments clearly had nothing whatsoever to do with their final confrontation — although it does seem fairly evident that he never would have made to the *penultimate* confrontation without it. And that the assurance that this was going to take Tom down gave Harry the nerve to submit to it. But that alone, in itself, didn’t do it.

But we did still know that there had to be a catch.

We’ve all known from the minute that it was first hinted — all the way back in Book 3 — that a Prophecy was even in the equation that Tom Riddle would be sure to manage to roll himself up by trying to dodge it. Also that if Harry Potter supposedly had a power that Tom “knew not” then you could bet 10 to 1 that Tom Riddle had probably given it to him.

But Harry Potter’s allegedly exceptional power to *love* the wizarding world out of Voldemort’s clutches never really materialized. He’s a self-absorbed little clod right to the final page of the final book. And it wasn’t the Prophecy demons that sent us off on that particular wild goose chase. It was Albus.

Indeed, Harry Potter’s whole exceptional power of Love™ ultimately appears to be just another exercise in Albus’s policy of flannel-mouthed flattery, to butter the kid up and make him feel good about his allotted rôle.

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After having shoved him into it.

And I **still** say that Albus deliberately deployed that Prophecy, hoping that it would goad Tom into doing something stupid. What else would you call parading into the Ministry to report that a Prophecy had been made, and handing over the sealed record? One probably already labeled something provocative like; “Concerning the fall of the Dark Lord Voldemort,” too.

Severus only told Lord Voldemort about it. Albus told the world.

And how often do we recall that all of Albus’s assurances on the fallacy of Prophecies was something that we were only given some sixteen years after Trelawney burped that one up? I don’t think that it was only *Tom* who got led up the garden path by believing in it — when it *happened*. Albus may be backed-along like fiddler’s elbows by the time we catch up to him and make him explain himself, but, given all of his known actions *at the time*, I think Albus believed that stupid Prophecy was “the answer” just as desperately as Tom Riddle did. And by the time we finally get his statement on the issue he’s already discovered that his willingness to palm all the responsibility off onto some “appointed hero” has only made the whole situation about six times worse.

Not that he’ll ever admit as much.

(Gilderoy Lockhart wasn’t the only flimflam man we’ve had to deal with in this series.)

And we got a useful counter-example on how to avoid being bitten by a prophecy when Harry was the audience to Trelawney’s second one, got distracted, and forgot all about it until it was over. No action, no consequences. Of course Harry’s

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usual luck held and he only got thrown one that had a (mercifully short) time limit.

Which of course isn't to say that Harry Potter *didn't* have a power that Tom couldn't access.

Because he oh-but-definitely did.

It just wasn't a power that Tom was unaware of. Our Tom was VERY well aware of that mysterious power. And he desperately **wanted** it for himself. And he told us so. On stage, in front of witnesses.

He just didn't have a clue of how to *get* it.

Nor that Harry Potter would soon *have* it.

Which is hardly surprising. That particular power hadn't been in circulation for centuries. (If ever.)

And by the time it mattered, Tom lacked the evident qualification anyway.

Just like we all suspected, he gave it to Harry.

Have you figured it out? I'm reasonably good at this, and Ghod knows it took me long enough.

And this time our missed opportunity isn't just a case of Rowling having only needed to have made a minor shift somewhere in order to give us an answer that “read”. She didn't need to do anything but realize what she had sitting right in front of her! Right there in her own hands, in her own words, already.

She even admits it! But she obviously doesn't appear to have a clue as to why her answer to the troublesome Riddle **worked**:

And it definitely isn't that lame psuedo-explanation that she had Harry boasting about to everyone. That “explanation” just confused the issue even more than it already was.

In fact, the explanation that she puts into Harry's mouth to

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“explain it all” is pure, unadulterated sewage. Which, considering what organic compound Potter seems all too often to use for brains, should probably not be that much of a surprise.

The power that Tom Riddle “knew not” was nothing less than the power to master the Elder wand.



Tom was hardly alone in that lack. Nobody else seems to have really understood how to do that either. Let alone have been able to.

Albus Dumbledore tap-danced around the subject with another load of flimflam and mock modesty about how no, he didn't really have the wand's **mastery**, *per se*, but the wand had agreed to let him *use* it. Heavily larded with his own boasts of having only used it “for good”

Gellert Grindelwald told us (and Tom) flat-out that *he* never had it. Period.

And for that matter, the wandmaker, Gregorovitch, who Gellert had stolen it from (and had informally “defeated” with it as he escaped) claimed to have had the wand only “to study” which doesn't sound to me like he was claiming the mastery of it either.

Are you detecting a pattern here?

Frankly, I don't think that **anybody** has *ever* truly had the mastery of that wand. Certainly not anybody in living memory.

And, I rather suspect, quite probably neither has anybody from its very beginnings either — particularly not if it really was given to someone by Death himself. That's a source that's every bit as risky to negotiate with as believing in something you're told by the Prophecy demons.

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Antioch Peverill allegedly demanded an “unbeatable wand.” Not, you will notice, a wand that would make **him** unbeatable, even though that’s probably what he meant.

By that token, all wands are probably “unbeatable.” You don’t defeat the wand, you defeat its holder. No. No one ever has beaten the Elder wand. After all, *they’re* all gone and it’s still here*.

*ETA, Spring 2024: It finally registers with me that the very fact that the Elder Wand **is** still here, and still *in use* is a potential hazard in and of itself. Wands do not have brains, or personalities, no. Not even *that* wand. But if we can accept the premise that there are chaotoc entities that are attracted to, and tend to haunt the places where magic emerges into the world, *any* wand is a *magical conduit*. If the Elder wand has been conducting magic for something like 700 years, what is the likelihood that it has managed to pick up something like passengers? Or some other form of interference? It may or may not not have been cursed when Death handed it to Peverill, but I wouldn’t give much for the chances that it isn’t something very much like cursed by now.

And I suspect it would be right up Death’s alley to have handed Peverill a supremely powerful wand that he would never have the wherewithal to actually master.

And that nobody else has ever mastered either. Although the holders of it have never let **that** piece of information out from under their hats. Indeed, a lot of them, like Antioch, probably never realized that inconvenient fact themselves.

And that little fool Harry Potter actually *believes* that the wand obeyed him because he snatched somebody *else’s* wand

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out of their hand in a scuffle a few weeks earlier? Please. Draco Malfoy was no more the master of the Elder wand than I am.

And *I’m* a Muggle.



Even though it turns out — after the fact — that you couldn’t necessarily **believe** him, Albus was much better at Explaining It All than Harry Potter. Even when Albus was just plain wrong. Like now.

Although, technically speaking I would downgrade this alleged unknown “Power” to a “unique advantage,” or more accurately, a “gift” — because when the chips were down the mastery wasn’t anything that Potter could actually invoke, or necessarily *use*. He just **had** it, at the very time when it counted.

And yet, even though it wasn’t thanks to anything that he inherently *was*, or anything that he was *aware* that he did, by the time of the showdown in the Great Hall, Harry Potter WAS unquestionably the Master of the Elder wand. Even if he doesn’t understand *why*.

Obviously, we need to take a closer look both at the issue of wand “mastery,” in general, and, just possibly the whole issue of the Elder wand itself, while we’re at it. Because however the business allegedly works with ordinary wands, it *doesn’t* work the same way with that one. And no one (*especially* Rowling) seems to have considered that.

Frankly, in DHs Rowling went overboard in her attempts to explain something that she fairly obviously didn’t understand herself. She needed A to do B and for the result to be C (Translation: she needed Harry and Tom to face off and for Tom to

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blow himself up), and that’s how it happened all right, but I think she hadn’t a clue of how or why it *worked*. So she started prancing about sending up smoke screens, deploying mirrors, and making pronouncements that sounded vaguely “arcane,” and basically fleeing when none puresueth, and none of the resulting “explanation” even fits together, let alone actually moves in concert in any kind of a rational sequence without simply falling apart. She’d already *given* us the explanation. She just never *realized* it.

This isn’t the first time I’ve tried to make sense of it either. But this time, for this particular article, I went back to the basics.



Issue #1: Wand “Mastery”

Apparently wand mastery actually always *was* an issue, even though by the time we reached DHs it reads like a pasted-on afterthought. My current suspicion is that Rowling probably always did intend for it to matter, but never took the time to give us a viable heads-up, until it was already way too late. (Too distracted by other issues, probably.) But we did get at least one possibly deliberate hint — for laughs — all the way back in CoS when Lockhart’s wand seems to have been actively trying to abandon him after his duel with Snape. But I cannot off the top of my head think of any other such kinda/maybe hints to point at until we reached DHs, and by that point the whole business had to be laid on with a trowel in order to make her climax work.

But. Before you can have any hope of “mastering” a wand, you have to have a reasonably sound grasp of what a wand IS.

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I gave a fair bit of thought to wands and their possible structure and function back when I first drafted out this whole essay collection back around 2002–’03 (see the essay entitled; ‘The Art & Science of Wandmaking’ in the Oh Wide, Wide (Wizards) World sub-collection). And I still think that what I drafted out then still holds together now without having to make exceptions for every second example, or do backbends to make the connections meet.

The basic parameters, to recap are:

Wands are focusing devices designed to serve as conduits for magical energies. Magic is a form of energy, rather like electricity. It operates over a fairly wide range of something very much like a spectrum, or, perhaps more properly, a “scale” of frequencies. Different types of spells are apparently known to transmit within certain ranges within the full potential “spectrum.” Consequently, Ollivander **can** tell you, accurately, that a certain wand will be good for charms, because he knows that the components of that wand will most easily conduct magic at the frequency that most charms operate.

Any individual wizard or witch’s own personal magic also has its own native range of frequencies. Therefore, a wand which is a good match to a wizard **will** work better for him than one which conducts in a different magical harmonic range. He gets a higher signal to noise ratio from it. But still, any trained wizard ought to be able to conduct magic though any non-defective wand well enough to function. There was no legitimate need to abruptly make all wands behave as if they were suddenly defective in the final book to get the point across.

Okay. So. Carrying this a bit further into the question of

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“mastering” a wand which Rowling threw at us at the 49th minute of the 11th hour, and trying to make it somehow fit, let’s consider what wands are *not*.

Wands are not people. They are not alive. They’re tools. They do not have minds. They do not have feelings. They do not, properly speaking, have memories.

However, a conduit connects at both ends. And wands do not appear to be designed to allow the energy to travel in both directions. A wand delivers its operator’s magic to their target. It is not unreasonable to assume that there is a resonance which occurs when it actually connects with a target. This resonance may well set up a form of feedback which is maintained at least for the duration of the spell. Indeed, given that rather a lot of the spells we have seen wizards using invoke *processes* which must be maintained for an appreciable amount of time before the task — which may be composed of several different components delivered in a sequence — is complete, it is extremely likely that a wand does indeed set up and register a relationship to whatever target its operator’s magic is affecting.

And since the magic the operator is conducting is traveling through the wand, to the target, it also registers what direction that energy is moving. The “polarity” so to speak. You do not want your magic to be forced back through your wand to you. We’ve seen that happen. It wasn’t fun for anyone involved. (And I’ll be getting back to that in a minute.)

Indeed I think a part of the wandmaker’s craft must be designed to prevent anything of that sort taking place under anything but extraordinary circumstances. Magic is supposed to travel through a wand only in the one intended direction. The



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wand may not precisely be “aware” (not having a brain, after all) but it registers that *it*; or rather, its operator, affects the target. The target does not affect it. Ron’s broken wand in CoS was defective in exactly that function. The operator’s magic could not be depended upon to flow in the correct direction.

And while they don’t have conscious memories (since they are not conscious) all wands have been shown to build at least a temporary log of the spells that they have most recently conducted, and the targets they have affected. The *Priori Incantatum* spell is designed to access this log. We’ve seen it do so.

We don’t know how long such a log really lasts. Probably not forever. In general usage, it is most likely to get gradually overwritten by the records of subsequent spells with different targets. But it must remain “set” for the duration of an active spell, and it does not immediately reset when the spell is concluded. A witch or wizard quite often is going to be conducting more than one spell to affect the same selected target. Therefore, a wand retains some sort of relationship with its most recent targets. And the log does not completely reset when new targets are selected, either. The record is retained until it is overwritten by more recent spells.

Which means that if one wizard hexes another and the other physically snatches the wand and tries to hex him back, the polarity of the log’s registration of who is the target is going to make for interference. Ergo: the last time Hermione met up with Bellatrix, Bellatrix had her writhing on the floor in the throes of *Crucio*, and since Harry snatched that wand as well as the hawthorn one, and the wand hasn’t been used for any significant number of other spells by a different operator in the



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meantime to overwrite the log, consequently, when Hermione picked up that wand and tried to use it, it was still registering her as the “target” not the “operator,” and she found it very difficult to get it to work. The polarity was wrong. Keep this in mind. It’s relevant.

Like I say. I don’t think this log lasts forever. Data requires storage, and wands don’t have a lot of mass for storing an extensive log of their past spells. But if not overwritten it does last an appreciable amount of time. In the Little Hangleton graveyard, Voldemort’s yew wand was spitting up a log of spells which were cast anything up to over a dozen years earlier, and would have continued to do so had Harry not broken the connection. So the information doesn’t simply fade over time. It needs to be overwritten. And the log of a 13-inch wand clearly can contain something like records of at least a dozen or so spells, because we saw that many all replay, ourselves.

After a long enough interval, particularly if the wand remains in use, it probably will not continue to register someone as a “former” target, even if that person was one. But we do not know how long an interval that requires. Moreover, there are external factors which can erase the log. We noted no complaints from Hermione about Bellatrix’s balky wand after that wand had been taken through Gringotts’s security waterfall. Indeed, she was using that wand to duel against Bellatrix herself before the end of the final battle. And holding her own with it, too. A conscientious seller of used wands would probably know how to erase such a log before putting any used wand into his stock.

Or at any rate, this is probably how it should be interpreted

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to work for *normal* wands. But there is no reason to suppose that this necessarily also applies to the Elder wand. We have been given to understand that the Elder wand is *unique*. Indeed, we’ve every indication that it flatly *doesn’t* work like that, and it is probably a widespread mistake to expect it to.

(We’ve still no good explanation for the amazing auto-wand of the Seven Potters, sequence. But I doubt that it had anything to do with Harry’s mastery of his own wand.)

So. Where does the Elder wand come into it? How is that one different from normal wands?

HOW did Harry manage to *master* the Elder wand?

Because obviously he did.



Issue #2: The Elder Wand

Here is where I think we need to ignore what Albus Dumbledore has to say about that wand — and for that matter, what he says about Harry Potter. Albus was not in a position to know that wand’s true history. Nor was he willing to believe that it might be precisely what legend claimed it was. Albus clearly doesn’t believe in a personified Death, and *he* certainly never claims to have been the “master” of that wand. Albus, after all, claims that the Elder wand was created by Antioch Peverill.

And I just do not see how a wizard such as what we are given to believe that Antioch Peverill was like, would create a wand that couldn’t be mastered, *know* that it couldn’t be mastered, and then boast about how it was unbeatable. So either he didn’t create it, or he didn’t know he wasn’t the master of it, or both.

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No. I really do think that we may have to at least consider the possibility that the wand really was given to some fool wizard in a bargain with Death. (Or possibly in a negotiation with something like a Prophecy demon *claiming* to be Death. In any case, some entity that is at least partially from the spirit plane, even though it manifestly is able to affect the physical one.)

And that the wand was booby-trapped.

Because if you reconsider the order of events as told in the story of the Three Brothers, Antioch Peverill demanded an unbeatable wand as a reward for escaping one of Death's traps.

He didn't win that wand in a fight. Death just created that wand and handed it to him.

And Peverill never was its Master.

Death is its Master.



I really do think that humans, and particularly human wizards, ought to be a little more open-minded about other cultures' interpretations of the concept of “ownership.” And perhaps they ought not to be *quite* so hasty to ascribe purely human traditions related to that concept to anthropomorphised allegorical entities. Certainly not when there is no shortage of other competing interpretations of the *same* concept among other sentient creatures who are *also* subject to that same entity, with all of whom you already have ample experience in dealing.

Like, say, Goblins?

Goblin views on property ownership may be very inconvenient to wizards, but they are hardly unfamiliar. And we are

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given to understand that by Goblin law anything that is made belongs to its *maker*. Even if the maker allows (or in modern terms licenses) its use by others.

Think about that.

Death has no particular need of a wand. Death isn't a wizard, after all. He isn't human, either. Yes, he deals with humans. He also deals with Goblins. And House Elves. And as many other races and species as you care to mention. He clearly had no objection to handing a wand out on a long-term loan to an endless succession of foolish wizards, however.

But it's still *His*. And eventually he will overcome *all* of that wand's holders.

Except that for the rest of this particular lifetime, it's Harry's.

So what did Harry do to win the mastery of the Elder wand?

Isn't it obvious?

He stood there in front of Tom to let Tom kill him. And Tom *did* kill him. Killed him and dropped him summarily into Death's own country, into Death's own keeping.

And then he picked himself up and walked back out.

Under his own “power.”



Which I think is probably the only thing that would have ever made an impression on that wand. Or, rather, on its log. That log could no longer record Harry as a target. He wasn't dead. However, a wand doesn't have a brain, and a wand only recognizes the target and the operator. No 3rd parties. So, it evidently recorded Harry as the *operator*. Even using an unblockable, unbeatable, permanent, failure-proof death spell

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on him, the wand hadn't had any lasting effect on Harry.

Indeed, I suspect that was always the whole point of all the nonsense in attendance to the “Deathly” Hallows. In order to “master” Death, you have to master *Death*. Whether you happen to have physical possession of all three of the fool Hallows at the time is immaterial.

Of course Harry'd never have been *able* to get up and walk back out if the Harrycrux hadn't been there to help spread the impact of Tom's AK. That curse *did* kill the Harrycrux. Wiped it out *completely*.

So, even if you can theoretically kill two people with one arrow, or one bullet, you evidently cannot necessarily kill two people with one AK.

And, since the connection between Harry and Tom was still live, and *open*, when Tom hit Harry with that AK *Tom* got hauled into Death's keeping as well.

And Harry **could** have let it kill him, too. He really *did* have a choice about whether or not to go back.

And if he *had* chosen NOT to go back. I suspect that Tom would have never regained consciousness. And then, when someone killed the snake, Death would have “taken him for his own.”

After all, Death was already holding the main portion of what was left of Tom. It was lying there under a bench screaming its head off. There's no way that *Tom* was going to be getting up and walking away under his own power. That was a power that he definitely “knew not.” But evidently, even though the Harrycrux was now gone, the connection between the two of them was somehow still active enough (probably something to do with the blood connection that Tom set up in GoF) that



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when Harry returned, he somehow dragged Tom along after him. Temporarily, at least.

Of course Albus hadn't a clue. Albus doesn't believe in a personified Death (who evidently hasn't bothered to come out and have a chat with Albus. Death is probably quite unimpressed with Albus). Harry doesn't have a clue either, or he'd never have spouted that load of bilge about having snatched the mastery from Draco Malfoy (oh Puh-leeze!). And apparently, for that matter neither does Rowling.



But the fact is that Harry Potter demonstrably came back from the celestial Kings Cross Station the Master of the Elder wand. And once he did so, no curse that Tom sent at him from that point touched him. Or, apparently anyone else, more than momentarily — although he was at least able to do *something*. Tom acquitted himself very well *defending* himself from Slughorn, McGonagall and Shackbolt. If all he was working with was his own magic, using a hostile wand, then he must once have been every bit as formidable as everyone keeps trying to claim.

But look at the log: that wand had just *killed* Tom Riddle. The Harrycrux *was* Tom Riddle, after all. And furthermore, it was *dead*. More to the point, it was a piece of Tom Riddle that was **still connected** to the one still walking around and trying to *use* that wand. Who in the wand's log now solidly registered Tom Riddle as a target. A *dead* target.

Which is where I suspect that the real uniqueness of the Elder wand may be confusing the issue. Death handed that wand to Peverill and Peverill expected it to work for him.



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And, it did. But Peverill was a designated *target*. ALL living wizards are designated targets to the Master of that wand.

But the Elder wand will function for any of them. It doesn't invoke the polarity reversal of a normal wand when a target picks it up and tries to use it. It doesn't necessarily enhance their own native powers, although it probably usually does, at least enough for them to notice a difference. And it probably does enable some functions (like being able to repair other broken wands). But it doesn't give them any clue as to the fact that *they* are the target.

However, NO wand is going to work properly for somebody who is already dead. None of the dead would expect a wand to properly **work** for them, either. Not even *that* wand. What Tom Riddle did not realize is that from the point that he regained consciousness in the forest, he was already a walking dead man.

And the Elder wand flatly *won't* work against its Master. And nobody can force it to. You cannot kill Death. And Tom Riddle *certainly* couldn't. OR Death's little scar-faced proxy, either.

So Harry Potter will either be killed in the course of his Auror duties by some other wand, or he may die in his bed at an advanced age. And in either case, he will take the Mastery of that wand back out of the world with him.

Tom was absolutely not the boss of that wand. And unlike Gregorovitch or Grindelwald, who realized when they were beaten, or Albus — who Gellert may have warned about the matter when he turned it over — and settled for mere cooperation, Tom just stubbornly kept trying. I'm a bit surprised he even managed to set the Hat on fire. And even at that, Neville doesn't seem to have been burnt.



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(And we're told outright that even though nobody stopped what they were doing to put it out, the Hat is still in service 19 years later.)



So how was that again?

“...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...”

How's about we try it; “and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, and he will be *given* power the Dark Lord knows not”? Indeed, and by the Dark Lord himself. That's the way Prophecies *always* work.

Although I think it's still a bit of a stretch to describe the Har-rycruX as a “power.”

And for the record, I'm not altogether convinced that Tom hadn't figured out the nature of his connection to the Potter kid by the end, either. Or why else would he have been so insistent that HE be the one to kill Potter? Clearly, if he had finally realized that the kid was carrying around one of his soul fragments, he had decided that that one was expendable. But nobody else was going to screw the odds by killing the kid and letting them get a hypothetical advantage over himself.

Which brings us right up to the final confrontation; an “unblockable” AK may ricochet off of a solid object (although we've never seen one do so. Generally they just damage that object), but it isn't going to bounce off of another **spell**. Spells are not solid. Or not unless they are something like a shield spell, and Expeliarmus isn't. Not unless **something** is in charge of that AK other than the caster. Or this is some amaz-



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ing hoopy new variant of an AK that we’ve never heard of (like the levitating one in HBP?), in which case I’m not even going to attempt to explain that degree of Rowling-patented nonsense.

But frankly, any attempt at an explanation for why the AK bounced off the Expelliarmus and yet *both* spells managed to travel in a straight line to solidly nail Tom instead of ricocheting off in two other directions is something that even I am going to have to ascribe to nothing other than sheer authorial fiat. Because I flatly don’t believe it works that way.

And if Harry has any sense at all he will take that wand to the Ministry and pitch it straight through the veil right back to its original owner and get it out of circulation permanently. If Tom could take it out of Albus’s tomb, so can anyone else, and put it back into circulation even if they haven’t a hope of ever mastering it. I’d say it’s made quite enough mischief to have earned itself an honorable retirement.

But in any case, it is clear that in the final reckoning, Ignotus Peverill isn’t the only wizard who will one day be meeting Death as an equal.



Minding the Gap

When it came time to post this essay it took some wibbling to decide whether to put it in the Missed Opportunities collection or down in the Briar Patch along with the plot bunnies. I finally decided that even though it reads a lot like fiction, it really still is more solidly a theory. And Rowling could have certainly done it herself if she wanted to. All the pieces seem to be in place for it.

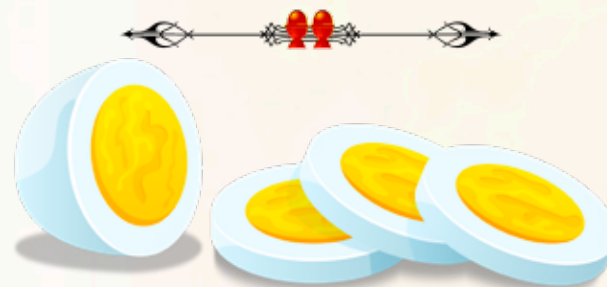
Over the course of 2003–2008 rather a lot of theories passed through the essay collection. Not to mention the Briar Patch or 7th Son subcollections. Some of them panned out, some not. Quite a few turned out to have had something to them, but they didn’t quite get there. And several were completely hosed.

Usually, I was sorry about that. One tends to be, after all. The only time one wouldn’t be sorry is when what you get in exchange for it is something better than what you could build for yourself. Rowling pulled that off a couple of times. Particularly in the early books.

But, whatever the case, one rather expects that a theory which has been conclusively and publicly shot down to *remain* shot down, rather than abruptly heaving itself upright and lurching back into the frame, like something from the ranks of the undead!

And, this one did. It is amazing the degree to which it did.

And as usual, I have only myself to blame. Because I knew better.



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One of the oldest theories in the whole collection is the one about the Grindelwald Conspiracy. I think it — in some form or other — was a part of the original essay collection when I first uploaded it in the spring of 2003.

That particular theory was around, in one form or other, for years before it was summarily canon-shafted by HBP. There honestly hadn't been anything in canon prior to HBP to contradict it, which, considering how thoroughly it got exploded by HBP was a bit surprising. It was a bit of a consolation, too. There really wasn't any way I could have guessed otherwise before that.

But, it got shot down, and it got shot down *thoroughly*.

Yet, I now discover that it's shed its skin and is back, slythering underfoot, flicking its tongue at me. It's embarrassing. It's also very disconcerting, regardless of how amusing I usually find snakes.

And, like I say, I really have no excuse.

Because in retrospect, it's perfectly obvious that however thoroughly Rowling's version of the official Riddle backstory may have gutted the original Grindelwald Conspiracy theory, it didn't plug any of the gaps which the Grindelwald theory had been designed to fill.

It merely painted them over.

Imho, in the course of the final three books Rowling did a lot of painting over gaps. In fact, by the end of the series she was painting with so broad a brush that she appears to have painted over the windows, the door, and made an energetic effort to hermetically seal the room. Unfortunately, paint alone will not support the weight of an inconvenient fact when one puts its foot through a hole in the floor.

Whereupon you abruptly find yourself in a snake pit.

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The gaps which the Grindelwald Conspiracy was designed to plug were:

- 1 The fact that — in our world, anyway — during WWII children were evacuated from London and (a number of other major cities), sending them out into the countryside to get them away from the Blitz. Wouldn't you expect Tom's orphanage to have done the same?
- 2 The Dark Arts are not taught at Hogwarts. Yet, despite the fact that Tom was unaware of even the *existence* of magic at the age of 11, and supposedly spent his summers in a Muggle orphanage, he still managed to become an accomplished Dark wizard by the age of 16.

Neither of these gaps were ever satisfactorily plugged. Apart from a thin, brittle layer of paint, there is nothing supporting them but open air.

One might feel a need to add at least one additional item to this list, which had not been originally on it. Namely that we are also supposed to accept the claim that:

- 3 Tom managed to set off three AKs in a Muggle drawing room at the age of 15 without activating his "Trace."

Now, admittedly none of these gaps are as unbreachable as they looked back during the 3-year summer.

The third, I have to admit, we didn't even consider back during the 3-year summer. However, back then, we also all believed that Tom had murdered his father and paternal grandparents

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upon finishing Hogwarts in 1945, and, having at least turned 17 by then would no longer be under anything like a Trace — which, if one recalls, was never officially mentioned in canon until DHs. (And makes no sense as described at that point.)

Most of us had already worked it out that there had to be some form of monitoring on underage wizards, since Dobby's wandless hover charm had brought the Ministry down on Harry as early as CoS. The Ministry had also been immediately aware when Harry had inadvertently blown up his aunt a year later. But that could have been some special arrangement specifically designed for Harry. Back in PS/SS Hermione claimed to have been trying out spells at home before starting Hogwarts and we never heard that the Ministry slapped her down for it.

So. Taking these points in order:

The mystery of the non-evacuation of London orphans in the Potterverse, upon examination, turns out to be something of a non-issue. Which I certainly didn't expect.

Despite Rowling's posing, and preening, back in the joint interview in the summer of 2005, and spouting off about how she "feels" that the events of the Potterverse run parallel to those in the Real World, and that the magical war and the Muggle war fed off each other, the official Grindelwald arc, as she finally gave it to us in DHs irretrievably renders just about every word of those statements into complete gibberish. It now appears that she was only striking poses to impress the swooning fansite owners. She ended up never actually supporting any of those statements, by, y'know, actually *building them into the story*.

Permit me to point something rather obvious out to you all:

A global war involving Muggles, and Muggle technology, in

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the mid-20th century, is not, repeat, NOT going to be resolved by one confrontation involving single-combat between two wizards — which, may I remind you, Muggles do not believe exist.

I'm sorry, but if you are determined to claim that you actually believe that, you are either a fool, or you are lying. Even if you are JK Rowling.

Of course the statement did distract us all for a couple of years trying to figure out how that was supposed to *work* rather than putting our efforts toward following any sort of trail that actually might have had something to do with the story. Assuming she had even left us such a trail.

Ms Rowling has stated in the past that she usually means what she says in her interviews — when she says it (only *usually?*). But that she often changes her mind. On this matter, if we are charitable, we will simply have to suppose that she changed her mind. Given the logistics of trying to depict a global war somewhere in the background in which a magical conflict and a Muggle one fed off one another I cannot say that I particularly blame her. It sounds like a recipe for an unworkable, no-win situation right there. But what she gave us in its place is no better.

It does, however, resolve the confusion of why children were not evacuated to the country to get them out of the way of the London Blitz.

In the Potterverse, there evidently was no London Blitz.

Grindelwald never took his war to Britain. We are flat out told as much in DHs, Chapter 2.

The progress of the entire mid-century Potterverse war is therefore cut loose from any considerations of the progress

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of the European theater of our WWII in one fell swoop. We cannot use WWII as our basic template. It no longer applies.

There is also now a good chance that the years of the Potterverse's mid-century war were not even the same years as the ones that our WWII occupied, either. Nor that the Potterverse even *had* two global wars, each with a European theater in its 20th century. In fact, if Grindelwald is supposed to have been behind the unpleasantness, it now seems likely that there was only one war and that it started at a different date, and, on the Muggle front at least, was finished much earlier. Probably by 1940. Possibly before Tom even started Hogwarts.

Not that British Muggles were not involved in the Muggle part of it. Frank Bryce certainly was off to a war at some point. But we cannot say to what degree or in what capacity. He may have gone off adventuring in someone else's conflict, in much the way that any number of young idealists marched off to take part in the Spanish Civil War — when they had no personal reason or obligation to.

All we know is that Frank was back in Little Hangleton by the summer of '42, and the account given in the opening chapter of GoF makes it sound as if he had been back for some time. A couple of years, quite easily.

Nor is there any indication that his war had ever reached out to touch the villagers themselves.



Admittedly, there does appear to have been something like WWI in the Potterverse. There is a war memorial prominently displayed in Godric's Hollow. But then, most of the British war

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memorials scattered across the countryside were originally erected commemorating WWI with the casualties of WWII simply tagged on in addition. In the Potterverse, there may have been no such addition.



As to the second point; how Riddle learned the Dark Arts when there was no one at Hogwarts to teach or guide him; Rowling made a half-hearted effort in DHs to retrofit this issue by contradicting what she had already told us in HBP. It wasn't at all a convincing effort, and it still failed to suggest a possible tutor or source for any of this supposedly classified information.

This was the primary issue that the original Grindelwald Conspiracy theory had been designed to address. I had originally postulated a group of pureblood supremacist Dark wizards who, for convenience, I had suggested might be a small cluster of the members of the Knights of Walpurgis, under the leadership of a fellow who went by the name of Grindelwald. I further proposed these wizards had taken Tom Riddle under their wing for the sake of his mother's bloodlines, and had been grooming him to serve them as a front man in a sort of "palace coup" takeover of the Ministry.

My purpose was to provide Tom with a group of mentors, who he had ultimately turned against, which might explain why, when he finally returned to set up his own coup, it was the scions of the families of exactly this sort of wizard that he first chose to deceive and enslave.

Well, the official Riddle backstory as we were given it in HBP allows no room at all for the Grindelwald Conspiracy as

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I had envisioned it. But neither does it plug the gap concerning just where and how Riddle learned quite so much about the Dark Arts at such an early age, when, as a Muggle-raised child he supposedly had no resources other than those actually at Hogwarts itself.

Admittedly, we have all figured out by now that yes, there are quite a lot of Dark Arts reference works in the school Library's Restricted Section. It is entirely possible to learn quite a bit about the Dark Arts in the Hogwarts Library.

But, you will not be *taught* them there.

And I really do not think that Tom would have so exposed his proclivities as to have drawn attention to himself by frequently discussing matters related to the study of the Dark Arts with the staff.

For that matter, neither are you able to just randomly wander into the Restricted Section during your lower years at Hogwarts. You need a permission slip signed by a member of the staff to do that.

Well, that much, at least, is easy enough to reconcile. Slughorn would have happily signed a slip for Tom to get into the Restricted Section. Tom could easily have lied about what he wanted to look up there. And probably did.

But this certainly doesn't explain the confusion about where Tom learned about the concept of Horcruxes, because I flatly do not believe Harry's later (and contradictory) statement that Tom was only asking what would happen if someone made multiple ones, or that Albus had been sure that Tom already knew about them when he broached the subject to Slughorn.

What on earth was the point of all that song-and-dance

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over recovering the Slughorn memory about if Albus already had other clear indications that Horcruxes were their problem? Was he just too squeamish to bring the subject up to Harry himself, and wanted Slughorn to break the ice for him?

As to that, looking back, Albus certainly never seems to have had the nerve to "upset" Harry by informing him that **he** was one of Tom's Horcruxes, either. He left it up to Snape to do the dirty work for him over *that*.

And for that matter, how could Albus be so sure that Slughorn's unedited memory would confirm his suspicion that there were multiple ones? Had he been eavesdropping in Slughorn's head without leave?

So this is a gap that is still a gap. We'll be getting back to it presently.



As for our belated third point; the problem of the Trace:

We do not know when the Trace upon underage wizards was first implemented, although it was evidently in reaction to legislation which was adopted in the later 19th century. Nor do we know whether the form of the Trace used in Riddle's day was the same as that used in Harry's. We are simply left to assume that it was. Which makes for a degree of difficulty here.

Had Tom *possessed* his uncle Morfin, made him cross the valley and murder the Riddles, we would have much less of a problem. Even Morfin's blackout could have been explained by an episode of possession, since that is exactly what happened with Ginny Weasley. But it was Tom himself that Frank Bryce caught a glimpse of on the Riddle property that night. And

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Morfin, while he remembered murdering the Riddles, didn't remember meeting his nephew.

Besides, Tom was all of 15 when he finally tracked down the Gaunts, and, accomplished Dark wizard or no, that seems a little young to be possessing people. (Although we do have to remember that the Diary Revnant appeared to be only 16, and I definitely think that possession had everything to do with Myrtle's murder.)

Or, for that matter, Tom's being able to murder the Riddles without setting off his Trace. The Trace wouldn't have led the Aurors to Morfin. Though Tom may very well have used Morfin's wand to do it. There would have been no trace on Morfin's wand.

Maybe that's the answer. At that point in time the Trace was linked to the wand, not the user. Morfin's wand wouldn't have had any kind of a Trace on it. Things may be different now.

— Even leaving aside the whole murky issue that at no point in the entire 4000 or so pages of the series has anyone other than Tom Riddle ever been cited as having “possessed” anyone. Taking possession of others does not appear to be a typical wizarding skill, and Tom's clear ability to do it is completely unaccounted for.

Another somewhat minor, but rather more suggestive issue which connects to this whole business at this particular juncture is the question of Tom having modified his uncle's memory. He is credited as having suppressed Morfin's memory of their meeting — which could be easily enough explained by Obliviate — but he is also credited with having overlaid Morfin's memory with his own memory of killing the Riddles. i.e., somehow, Tom definitely already knew how to extract and share/deposit mem-

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ories into external storage by the age of 15.

In the year following this incident he went on to build the entire function of a Pensieve (sealed and incapable of spilling, or of being further edited) into a paper Muggle diary.

We certainly did not really get the impression from Tom's “fishing expedition” to discover what Headmaster Dippet was going to do about the death of a student that he was a particular pet of the Headmaster's. Dippet had some trouble remembering just who Tom Riddle was. So it is unlikely that Tom had free access to the school's Pensieve. And a Pensieve is not the kind of magical artifact whose proper use is immediately evident.

So where did Tom learn about Pensieves (which we have been told are rare) and how to use one. For it seems plain from the business with Morfin that Tom already knew how to get a memory into and out of a Pensieve well before he showed up on his uncle's doorstep.



But, regarding the Trace:

Frankly, Rowling seems to have bundled the Trace into the story at the last minute in an attempt to make the escape from Privet Drive seem more “desperate” and “exciting,” yet nothing happened to Harry due to his performing magic during that escape. Despite the fact that he was throwing spells around as much as everyone else involved, there were no consequences of his still being under “the Trace.” If we are to believe Albus, this was because he was throwing spells around in the company of other wizards, so the Ministry couldn't tell who was actually performing the magic that was going off all around him. Never-

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theless. *He* was the only one in that party who still *had* the Trace on him. Everyone else was legally an adult. If the Trace actually **works** at all, it ought to have indicated that *someone* underage was using magic, *somewhere*. (Ergo: the Trace *doesn't* actually work, and we might just as well forget about it. Or, rather, that the Trace only works at the author's convenience.)

So, given that the Trace seems to be bogus, are we to assume that *any* magic *anywhere* is going to be registered somewhere in the Ministry? People were throwing about AKs in the presence of at least one minor. Where was the Ministry in all that? The Ministry hadn't fallen yet at that point.

In which case, what is the point of it? Why put a trace on people for the purpose of being alerted when they perform unauthorized magic if the tracking spell doesn't even tell you whether they are the ones doing it? It would make more sense to put magic sensors on the homes and schools of Muggle-born wizards to track when magic gets performed there, rather than trying to follow the child around.

But of course, that would entail singling out *Muggle-born* wizards, and of course the Ministry doesn't do that! (*Riiiiight.*)

If you ask me, the Trace is a load of hooley that Rowling shoe-horned in to use as a retrofit. She only remembered it whenever she wanted to throw an artificial stumbling block in Harry's way. And in common with most of Rowling's retrofits it raises more questions than it answers. Frankly, this one really doesn't hold up at all. One can readily accept that the Trace wouldn't activate in the Castle or on the school grounds (or that if it did, no one would take the slightest bit of action about it). But you would expect it to be tracing the use of unauthorized underage

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magic in Hogsmeade. Kids as young as 13 are routinely allowed to go to the village — with their wands — on Hogsmeade weekends, and yet have we *ever* seen or heard of *anyone* getting in trouble for using magic in Hogsmeade? Not once. And don't try to tell me that the kids off in Hogsmeade for the day haven't been casting magic there. We've seen them do it.

And it still doesn't explain how three AKs went off in the Riddles' drawing room and no Trace pointed the Ministry anywhere at Tom. The best we can do from what we have been told is that it pointed them at the nearest known wizard, who, of course, was Morfin. Which is just not satisfactory at all.

But it does rather explain why the Ministry is so piss-poor at catching the perps who were facilitating Voldemort's reign of terror with magical attacks on the Muggle citizenry, doesn't it? The Ministry has technology that can immediately pinpoint anyone who mentions Voldemort by name, but it cannot identify who sets off an illegal spell.

Right.

I've tried to use search engines that worked like that.



There are probably other similar gaps lying around which were already in place before HBP or DHs came out, but that much will certainly do to be going on with. In any case, you can see the kind of holes I was trying to patch when I first drafted out the Grindelwald Conspiracy.

However, I had completely overlooked the rather more serious gap which just opened up underneath me in June, 2008, a full year after DHs came out.

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And I knew better. I just didn't pay attention.
So, just what opened this new, and critical gap?

Rowling's unthinking invocation of the literary trope of the "orphan."



There is no getting around the fact that literature is crawling with orphans. Orphans are a trope that gets deployed in stories intended for just about every level of audience. And the way the trope is used varies somewhat according to who its intended audience is.

In children's adventure tales, you are often convinced that the protagonist is an orphan merely to get the grown-ups out of the way, so they will not hijack the story. Indeed, so many protagonists of children's adventures are orphans that you sometimes rather get the impression that orphans all must lead very dashing and exciting lives.

In YA novels being an orphan is frequently the focal point of the story's conflict, since one whole purpose of YA fiction is to extrapolate what it takes to function as a young adult. Often a far-too-young adult. Indeed, an "adult" aged 10 or less.

But fiction marketed to adults also makes frequent use of the motif of the orphan, sometimes as the protagonist, sometimes as a supporting character, sometimes as the "damsel in distress" or the McGuffin. One could probably attempt to generalize about the use of the orphan in fiction intended for an adult audience, but you will have to excuse me if I decline that particular invitation, the field is just too broad.

Nor is it only fiction or "literature" which invokes the orphan

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trope. This trope is also a staple element in myth and folklore. I am inclined to suspect that this was the manner in which Rowling was attempting to deploy it. This may have been a mistake. She was writing fiction. She ought to have used a fictional variant. It's not like there aren't enough of them.

Folklore is not literature. Nor is it, properly speaking, fiction. It is essentially psychodrama, and very little in it is really what it pretends to be. The "evil stepparents" are in fact your own parents whenever they set out to thwart you. The witch who tries to enslave or devour you is not really a witch, the wolves in the woods are not really wolves. You can flitter about and amuse yourself with the surface of the tale without digging any deeper, but if you are wise, you will take nothing that you meet there for granted, or at face value.

And, while any author can borrow from folklore and make insertions from it into their work, what they will create is fiction. They can potentially create literature, and sometimes, very rarely, they may synthesize myth, but an individual author never "creates" folklore. The transfer goes in only one direction. It is not possible for an individual author to produce folklore.

That takes a village. And a great deal of time.

At that point Rowling had not yet altogether released her story into the keeping of the village.

Before the (now global) village can subject Rowling's story to the long winnowing process and distill it into its essence, it would have to pry it out of her hands.

And when the village is finished with it, it will no longer be Rowling's story.

But that is neither here nor there. It is unclear whether

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Rowling is aware that folklore is not really fantasy, regardless of the fact that modern fantasy has adopted many of its trappings wholesale, or that it was always going to be beyond her skills to produce any. Fictional fantasy was as close as she was ever likely to get. For most authors, that would be enough.



So what went wrong with the trope? Given that orphans are as common as dirt in adventure fiction, how did Rowling's deployment of the orphan trope manage to open up a gap big enough to fall through?

It appears that she overlooked what being an orphan entails. She was fixated on the orphan's mere lack of living parents.

She was happy enough to make use of an orphan's lack of family responsibilities, but she wasn't prepared to deal head-on with the ramifications of an orphan's narrowness of prospects.

Right off the top: Let me assure you that I am not talking about Harry, here. Harry Potter, as our universal cinderlad had to be an "orphan," and he had to be an orphan of exactly the specific variety that he is. A child who has lost his parents, but who nevertheless has a identity and a hereditary place in his society, which he has been denied. Complete with unsympathetic relatives who will, nevertheless, house him until he comes of age.

This is not an orphan, this is, in fact, the "Long-Lost Heir." Neville also fits this pattern, at least to some degree. Harry and Neville have both lost their proper parents, but they are not truly orphans. And for that matter, neither is Teddy Lupin, so there was no convincing reason for Rowling to murder his



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parents in order to try to make him one.

But Tom Riddle was.

Tom was not merely "an orphan," but an orphan who was raised in an orphanage.

Traditional orphanages, particularly the sort you encounter in literature, did not house children until they came of age, you know. It housed them until they reached an age to legally work for a living. And then the kids were hired out to employers, who took over the responsibility of housing and feeding them. The orphanage washed their hands of them at that point.

Traditionally orphans in Cities were hired out into domestic service, as boot boys and scullery maids. Out in the country they were taken on as farm laborers. And that was usually the end of any chance for formal education for them. A farmer's or tradesman's education was typically 8th grade or its equivalent (i.e., 3rd year. Just like Hagrid). That was certainly the case for most orphans. High School was *High School*. And was generally only attended by the children of the middle class, or those working people whose parents could afford to keep them in school an additional 3–4 years.

I knew that. My own grandmother hadn't been able to attend school beyond 10th grade because her parents couldn't afford to keep her there any longer. She went to work as a filing clerk at 15.

I'd read plenty of stories which had been about orphans. And they were nearly all about finding one's own place in the world — and as often as not that was defined as work that they were suited for, and enjoyed, and which offered the possibility of a future.

I remember that in such stories, as I gather traditionally hap-



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pened in the in the Real World, in the orphanage, Sunday was “visiting day.” When their chores were done, the children would dress in their best and prepare themselves to line up in the hall or the parlor to be inspected in case someone came looking for a youngster to hire and take away with them. Occasionally, if one was really lucky, a couple might be looking for a child to adopt. Stories often followed this particular dreamscape. But, in reality, if a kid didn’t hire out by the time they reached the legal age to work full time, then the orphanage had no further responsibility toward them, and they were turned out on their own. Then it was probably the factory for them then. Or the mines.

Why on earth didn’t I remember that?

Because I didn’t. I completely forgot about the whole issue until an e-mail exchange with one of the authors who has a number of novels over in the Publications area pointed it out to me in passing. This particular author, Arsinoe de Blassenville, had a history of pointing out to me well-scaled and impeccably placed hypothetical plot elements which actually manage to make sense of the kind of twaddle that Rowling uses in the place of a history for her world. I am deeply indebted to her.

And, returning to the point of this exercise, at just what age might an orphan like our Tom expect to be cut loose to fend for himself? How old did you have to be to work for a living in Britain in the mid-20th century?

Well, in the UK, as I wrote it, originally, that age was 16. I don’t know what the legal working age was in 1940. It could have been as young as 13 or 14.

So — at the very least — by the time 16-year old Tom was asking Headmaster Dippet to permit him to stay for

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the summer, he may have already known that his orphanage wouldn’t have taken him back.

Whoops! I didn’t see that there was a *gap* there!



Rowling certainly doesn’t seem aware of there being a gap. Despite all her work for children’s charities. And I’m sure that she has to have read any number of stories that featured orphans, too. I mean it would be much more difficult for a person not to.

But upon the whole, we’ve lucked out, because the series is finished. Rowling may or may not ever produce the Scottish Book, but she isn’t suddenly going to insert one of her usual lame explanations into the existing narrative that creates more confusion than the original problem did in order to try to patch it.

This one we are free to deal with, ourselves.



Actually I cannot really fault Rowling too much for not having realized that this was a hole that needed plugging. No one else seems to have realized it either. And I do suspect that she was deploying the folklore iteration of the orphan element, not the literary one. Folklore doesn’t much give a damn about legal working ages, child labor laws, or documentation.

And, for that matter I haven’t been able to really nail down just what was likely to have been Tom’s experience of reaching leaving age at his orphanage either. The light, once-over I did trying to research it turned up variables that were all over the map.

Leaving age rose as the 20th century progressed and there were fewer jobs for which an employer would be willing to hire

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a child of 15 or younger full-time. Also as the century progressed, more and more jobs required the equivalent of a High School diploma or GED. An orphanage nowadays would at least house a child until he finished his schooling. But I did certainly find anecdotal incidents of 20th century orphans who were turned out at 14, or even 13. A lot depended on who ran the orphanage, for while many were run by private concerns, others were run by the local government, or a church, and there appear to have been no standards to which all were held. Still, Tom's orphanage was clearly understood to be an *orphanage*, it was not a workhouse.

So even though it may be a stretch to put Tom Riddle out on the streets at 14 in '41 it is far from an impossibility to see him there. If Tom had been a nice child, and well-liked, the very fact that he had his "scholarship" for Hogwarts to cover his maintenance for most of the year might have led the orphanage to stretch a point and give him space over the summers until he finished. But it is obvious that he had blotted his copybook badly enough that (without magical coercion) although Mrs Cole wasn't prepared to hand even Tom Riddle over to the first dodgy-looking stranger with a plausible tale, she would have wanted him out from under her roof at the earliest possible opportunity.

But we are still stuck with the question of what did Tom do in the summers after he outgrew his orphanage?

And when one stops to finally **ask** that question, you realize that it isn't really that difficult to paste in a viable answer.

We might as well try. Rowling isn't going to do it.



So what do we have, and where do we start?



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Well, we might as well start in the summer of '38, with an 11-year-old Tom Riddle who has just found his way into Diagon Alley for the first time. Completely unsupervised.

With a small bag of gold coins from the Governors' Fund, and a list of supplies that are going to be required. And a whole new world to investigate.

He also has magic at his disposal, a remarkably high degree of control over it for his age and a history of roaming around Greater London unsupervised. I imagine that his orphanage was perfectly happy to see the back of him for the day whenever he slipped out. He may have returned to the orphanage only to sleep. Which suited everyone just fine. And no one had any real control over him out on the streets of London.

Now stop and consider what that suggests.

It isn't as if he was a "well brought-up" child, after all.

Item: He has magic, and knows something of how to use it.

Item: He is a bully who likes exercising and demonstrating his power over others.

And, as my fellow traveler Swythyv reminded me, he is a thief.



You know, with magic at his disposal, I think he got his hands into the till in any number of the local shops. Just because his trophy collection back at the orphanage was made up of items of no particular value, doesn't discount the likelihood that he helped himself to untraceable cash whenever the opportunity presented itself.

From Albus we were given to suppose that his satisfaction



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was in the taking of trophies, not their intrinsic worth. But I'm no longer sure that such a reading is objectively true. And indeed, his collection of essentially worthless trophies may simply indicate that he'd already sold or pawned the ones which had any real intrinsic value.

A fanfic author might spin out a tale of a veritable little Artful Dodger, but I do not write fanfic, and I suspect that Tom was a bit less... *professional* than that. But I think he certainly wasn't above helping himself to loose change, and he certainly wasn't above shoplifting.

And he didn't know squat about wizarding security measures.

And I still think he needed a mentor to get to where he had got to a mere four years later..



So. Who is lurking in our cast of characters that is unethical enough to agree to teach a child the age of our Tom the Dark Arts?

More to the point, who do we know about who could do so, and would *profit* from such an arrangement? Who have we met, in Diagon or Knockturn Alleys that has something to gain by investing in the training of a Dark Wizard?

Because I do not think that you are going to find anyone who would undertake such tutelage out of the goodness of their heart. However much one may approve of the Dark Arts in either theory or practice, or however much Tom may have wanted to learn them, one does not undertake to train a Dark wizard unless one has a *use* for one.

And such a person would probably want their trainee to be under obligation. It's safer that way.



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So, who have we met who *would* have a legitimate use for a fledgling Dark wizard?

How about someone who deals in intrinsically Dark, or cursed objects for a living?

Can you say; "Caractacus Burke"? There, I was sure you could.

Caractacus Burke, who we can easily suspect never did anyone a disinterested favor.

Caractacus Burke, who Riddle is *known* to have been working for just a few years later.

Caractacus Burke, who, when you stop and think about it, is most unlikely to have hired a random stranger off the street.

In fact, if Riddle finished school and went right off to work for Burke, it rather suggests that they already knew one another, doesn't it?



We were given only one real glimpse of Caractacus Burke in the course of the series, and we do not know precisely when that likeness was taken.

However, the most probable date of the Burke interview in Albus's collection of memories would have been during the investigation of the death of Hepzibah Smith when the DMLE might have wanted a word with the sales assistant who had visited the lady a couple of days before her death. They seem also to have wanted to get some provenance on the Slytherin locket, which Madam Smith had originally purchased from Burke. Certainly the portion of the conversation which we were shown was primarily concerned with where and how Burke had originally acquired the locket. Such an interview is most likely to



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have taken place somewhere in the vicinity of 1947–1950 give or take.

We never were given any reason for why Albus would have been investigating the Slytherin locket. Rowling needed him to be able to inform Harry about it, and didn't bother to include a reason for why Albus would be interested in it. These days, I rather think that he got that memory from Alastor Moody who was an active Auror at the time, and may well have been involved in the investigation of Madam Smith's death. Whether that death was determined to be due to misadventure, or murder, it would certainly have been investigated. As would the robbery. After all, we do not know that it was only the Hufflepuff cup and the Slytherin locket which were determined to be missing from her collection. Tom might not have stopped there.

Albus, at the time, may still have still been trying to build a case for a retrial for Morfin Gaunt. Which is another investigation which would have suggested taking a closer look at a certain Tom Riddle.

Bob Ogden had been a part of a Magical Law Enforcement Squad in the mid-1920s. I think that Ogden still found his run-in with the Gaunts memorable even twenty years or more later.

By which time, according to Harry Potter, Burke was "a little old man"



Well, we know that Borgin & Burke carries an ever-changing and highly eclectic stock, and much of it would be obviously valuable and probably quite fascinating to a youngster

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like Riddle. Who, let us not forget, may have already been in the habit of always investigating anything he came across that resembled a pawnshop. From our glimpse of him, Burke also wore his hair in such a manner that it completely covered his eyes, which might have tempted young Tom to suppose that Burke would not notice what he was up to.

I wouldn't be a bit surprised to discover that the first time Tom wandered into B&B he tried to lift something, and was caught at it. I also suspect that Burke's lesson of; "thou shalt not steal from *my* shop" may have been just as startling and rather more painful than Albus's lesson of; "stealing isn't nice." I rather think that any security measures at B&B would be something other than gentle.

Which would have given both Burke and Riddle ample opportunity to take the other's measure.

At that point Tom, who had already been given ample reason to be wary of wizards, was probably on his best behavior when dealing directly with them and trying to impress them favorably, even if he hadn't quite perfected his act. So he may have turned on the charm and passed the faux pas off as innocent curiosity and tried pumping Burke for information about the items in the shop. I wouldn't count on whether he fooled Burke or not, but he may have, and, you know, I really don't think Burke would have a lot of objection to someone taking an interest in the kinds of artifacts he deals in. Even if it isn't someone in a position to purchase anything.

In any case, Burke may have been a bit more forthcoming about the kind of items he had in the shop than Borgin was in Harry's day. Or at least more so than one would expect him

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to be toward a child who was clearly not going to actually buy anything. Even if the inquiry was somewhat less gauche than Hermione's. But if Tom came back with questions about the items in the shop on a regular basis, that might have eased over a bad first impression. Particularly over time.

While we are at it, Riddle may have already managed to liberate some other item from some other shop (or somebody's pockets) and offered to sell it to Burke.

And Burke was likely to be quite informative on the sort of artifacts he dealt with. Information regarding the "value-added" nature of his curios is his stock in trade. And most varieties of artifacts eventually turn up at B&B if you wait long enough.

I think it may have been the list mom over at the loose canon Yahoo group who first floated the possibility that Tom had probably taken summer jobs in Diagon or Knockturn Alley.

I didn't stop to explore the possibility back when the subject first came up over there, since the probability of the orphanage's kicking Tom out at 14 (or 16) hadn't registered yet. But that possibility really does line a lot of our ducks up into a very tidy row.

It even inserts some plausibility regarding my facetious suggestion that Tom was the one who tinkered with the curse on the silver-and-opal necklace until it zaps you before you can even put it on!

I'm pretty sure that once he found the place, Tom was in and out of B&B fairly regularly. Burke probably thought he'd attached a little fanboy. More fool he. Nor would he have much questioned the legality of the methods that Tom used to "discover" any items that he might occasionally bring in to sell, or, later, to separate collectors from their treasures when Tom

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went to work for him. Someone determined to write fanfic could parlay the whole association into a regular Fagin's Academy. But I won't be going there. Not quite.



So. At one end of our equation we have Tom, at loose ends in London. Possibly as early as the summer of 1941 — having been turned out of the orphanage because he'd reached the age of 14 and had no intention of becoming a boot boy. He had his "scholarship" to Hogwarts, but no other obvious immediate prospects.

At the other end, we have Burke.

It really is easy to speculate that Tom had been in and out of Knockturn Alley during the summers for the past three years.

The possibility becomes even more likely if we postulate that Tom found the Room of Hidden Things fairly early in his Hogwarts career. That place is a treasure trove. And even though a lot of what is hidden there is rubbish, more than a few things in that room were described as being potentially quite valuable. And no one was claiming them. I rather suspect that our Tom made a little shopping trip among the hidden items before school broke up for the summer each year after he found his way in there, and kept himself in pocket money thereby.

Which would have given him ample reason to be very well acquainted with Burke.

And by 14 he'd learned how to charm people. If he had known just where to find Slughorn he might have had Sluggo pull a string for him here and there, and parlay that into summer housing, but I rather think he thought of Burke first. He may have decided to see if he could get taken on for the summer

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at B&B or one of the other shops in the district on his own account, before he started asking assistance from someone who had to be contacted by owl. Or to whom he would need to be “obliged” for the rest of his natural life, and who might end up asking favors of him.

His actual needs weren’t as great as all that. He wasn’t really accustomed to “living large”. If he was able to wrangle housing (and possibly board) at his employers’ expense, with the Governors’ fund to cover his school supplies, he was primarily just in need of the aforesaid pocket money.

Of course he might well have started a growth spurt by then, which would have put him in need of clothing as well, but we know there are 2nd hand clothing shops in Diagon Alley. And by that age he might have been able to charm his employers into seeing to it that he was “presentable.”

And Burke might have stepped in with a counter-proposal.

Something on the order of an apprenticeship, or perhaps some other form of contract, one magically binding. Tom would come to work in the shop for the summers and Burke would house and feed Tom, and teach him what he needs to know in order to deal effectively with the stock. Much of which fights back. Essentially, Tom would have a place to sleep, meals during the work day, and Burke owns him until closing time. It was of course unspoken and not written into the agreement that Tom would continue to bring Burke whatever items of value he could, at the end of each school year to add to the shop’s stock.

For an agreed-upon term of years.

And there was no need to let Hogwarts know of his change of address. A Post Owl with the following year’s texts and sup-

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plies list will find him regardless of where it’s addressed to.

Well, why not? No one is claiming any of the items that the boy brought in. What is the harm of putting them back into circulation? The boy was going to need a job after finishing school, too. He’s bright, personable, Burke would teach him the ropes and take him on full time once he has his NEWTs.

And I think that someone of the caliber of Burke would want the boy under a binding contract, and Tom really didn’t have a broad choice of other options — or the leisure to explore them. The orphanage had already turned him out, and he had nowhere else to go.

And summers spent working at B&B certainly seems to be the most economical way of connecting the dots for having Tom know what a Pensieve was and how to use one by the following summer.



Something else which one suddenly wonders is whether his employer might have eventually pulled some strings in order to have his employee, who was effectively an “emancipated minor” removed from the oversight of the Trace.

Burke could probably make a good argument for it, since Tom was an employee who he was “paying” (in kind if not cash), and to not be able let him use magic — especially in *that* shop — would not be the most effective return for his investment. Burke was also fairly well-connected (well enough for someone in his family to have married one of the Blacks), and some of his connections probably had Ministry ties. Tom’s place of employment was also in a secluded, exclusively wizarding district, so

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there was no risk of his performing magic in front of Muggles there. Or of doing so unsupervised. I also imagine that Burke might have intended to occasionally send Tom out on errands in Muggle London — with which Tom was familiar. Possibly even errands of a sort that the least said to the Ministry, the better.

Tom would be off to Hogwarts in September, of course, and would probably stay there during term breaks at someone else's expense, although perhaps not. He might have come to help out during the Christmas rush. But I could readily see an old crook like Burke pulling the strings for his own benefit, especially if it put the boy under obligation and brought him back the next summer.

And the next, and the next, and the next. It was four summers before Tom was finished at Hogwarts. Although he would have been of age during the last of them.

And neither of them would have really seen any reason to be trumpeting information about that contract around the School.

It would also make all kinds of ease in connecting the dots between what we are actually told in canon if Tom was not actually under any form of Trace by the time he tracked down his mother's family, even if he was still only 15. He certainly cast three AKs in a Muggle drawing room before he had even sat his OWLs, and no one came hunting for him.

From what we were actually shown of that episode, he also showed up at Morfin's hut after dark. And in summer, in Britain, dark doesn't come until quite late. i.e., It was after the shop's closing time, and Tom was off-duty. He was still too young to legally Apparate, unless Burke had reason to clandestinely teach him to, but he was clever enough and resourceful enough to have made or bought an illegal round-trip portkey. (Made

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is my guess. I doubt he would want anyone to get a handle on where he was going.)

It certainly didn't do Burke any harm to have a contracted trainee that he could depend upon for several years running, either, rather than try to find new help every summer. The inactivation of the boy's Trace (assuming that the Trace actually exists and isn't simply a boogymen to threaten school kids with) may have been only for as long as Tom had an employer vouching for him, but I rather doubt that the Ministry reactivated it after closing time and switched it back off again in the morning. More likely they inactivated it once he reported for work at the end of June and then formally reinstated it the day before Tom would catch the Hogwarts Express.



Burke may very well have negotiated a deal with young Tom that appeared to primarily benefit himself, but Tom was in no great hurry to get out of it. Certainly not while it gave him housing and pocket money during his summers, and if it inactivated the Trace as well, he was coming out way ahead. The bargain also gave him virtually unlimited access to some highly esoteric resources and information.

A formal apprenticeship might have traditionally covered 7 years. At the time that Wizarding Secrecy was established, those were always for 7 years. If Burke negotiated something like that with young Tom that would have bought him Tom's services until some date in the summer Tom was 21. And, in those days, among Muggles, Tom would have been counted a minor until that age as well, even if you could be turned out into

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the street to earn your living at 14 (and he would have grown up under the mindset that you formally come “of age” at 21).

Tom may not have felt he was getting the worst of the deal, either. Even if it did inconveniently give him some long-standing obligations that he was going to need to meet. And so far as that is concerned, I am sure that he found B&B well worth his time. It would have been a highly productive training ground for such matters as were rarely encountered at Hogwarts. He was learning to recognize artifacts of virtue, and getting an intensive crash course on dealing with Dark artifacts and cursed objects every summer, between sweeping and dusting and making nice with the collectors. (Who were potentially very useful contacts for him, too.)

He also probably had access to materials and references which may very well not have been in the Hogwarts Library’s collection. B&B has a broad clientele, and they are just about all Dark Arts connoisseurs. And I am sure that Burke handles choice items from any number of their estates.

No, I don’t really think Tom was in any hurry to get out of that contract. Particularly since, if Founders’ artifacts were what he was really after, it put him into exactly the place where he was most likely to get a line on them.



While we are at it; as of the end of 2019, a long-belated issue was brought up by one of my correspondents. It is actually a matter related to Tom’s Horcruxes, but it has a strong connection to B&B. So, a digression:

By Harry’s day, one of a pair of vanishing cabinets is on

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display in the main showroom at B&B. This cabinet, and its Hogwarts counterpart were drawn to our attention in CoS, and featured prominently over the course of OotP and HBP.

We have absolutely no indication of when that cabinet got into the shop. In the past, I have speculated that the two cabinets constituted Headmaster Phineas Nigellus Black’s emergency route home to #12 Grimmauld Place in London. We know from the dodgy Black Family Tapestry sketch which Rowling contributed to a charity auction in February 2006 that Phineas Black died in 1926, that his sister Elladora died in 1931, and that his daughter Belvina married a Herbert Burke.

It is easy to suppose that after her father, and possibly her aunt’s deaths, Belvina asked for the cabinet and her brother let her take it. We have no information of what relationship Herbert Burke was to Caractacus Burke, but in a society as small as Rowling insists the wizarding world of Britain is, it is unlikely that they would be unrelated. Belvina’s death is recorded as being in 1962, which is well after the period that Tom would have been in and out of the premises. Therefore, I had speculated that Draco Malfoy had connected the dots from family anecdotes, when he heard Montague’s story of being trapped in the cabinet, and utilized this information when he was charged with enabling an invasion of the school.

However; while this extrapolation makes a degree of sense, and is not contradicted by anything that is actually in canon, it is only one possibility. How large a family are the Burkes, and did a part of the family live above the shop? For that matter, although the two cabinets had clearly been the property of some member of the Hogwarts staff—for otherwise the second cabinet would

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have hardly been at Hogwarts — we have no certainty that it was actually the property of Headmaster Black.

It could have been there for decades before Black became Headmaster.

And, for that matter, the London cabinet might have reached B&B well before Tom was employed there.

I will be exploring these possibilities more thoroughly in some other essays in this collection. It is not so relevant to this one.



I'm not convinced that Burke ever knew anything of Tom's family background, though. Tom wouldn't have spread it around. For that matter, Tom didn't know anything of it himself when he and Burke first met. And all that anyone could say for sure is that Riddle was not a traditional wizarding name.

In fact, it may well have been Burke who finally told Tom to forget about trying to trace his father, since Burke would have known who all the oldest families were, and that there were no Riddles among them. Plus, it would have been over the following year, his 4th, the first year after Tom had (hypothetically) gone to work for Burke, that Tom, abandoning his attempt to get information about the Riddles, started trying to trace his mother's family and got a line on "Marvolo" and the Gaunts before the year was out.

Before the following summer was over Tom was flashing around a ring with the sigil of the Deathly Hallows questers. Which Burke would certainly have recognized, although he wouldn't necessarily volunteer the information if Tom didn't think to ask about it. Indeed, Tom may have claimed to have

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traced his mother's family, and that the ring was an heirloom by then — or, given what he had arranged for Morfin, possibly not.

But the fact that the sigil wasn't really associated with any single family, but with an exclusively wizarding not so—"secret society" might have gone a long way toward convincing Burke that the boy might not be out of the top drawer, himself, but he had some sound antecedents. I doubt that he ever knew that Tom was a Parselmouth. Tom had already learned not to boast of that in public.

I suspect that for the rest of the summer that he was 15, Tom was checking back through the shop records from the period around his own birth. Morfin had told him about Slytherin's locket, as well about as his Muggle father. If his mother had taken it to London with her, but not had it by the time Tom was born, then she was likely to have sold it at some point. And she wasn't likely to have sold it to Muggles.

And, if that was the case, he would have soon struck pay dirt. And that would have given him all the more reason to hang around that shop.

After all, collectors always come back.



Because, yes, I am considering that we seriously need to question Harry's confident assumption that after having sweet-talked the story of what happened to the Ravenclaw diadem out of Helena's ghost, Tom set right off for Albania before he took up his post at B&B. We've got absolutely nothing but Harry's spur of the moment conviction that Tom did anything of the sort. And nothing else in canon supports it.

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If Tom had signed a contract with Burke as a boy, and was obligated by contract to work at the shop until the summer after he turned 21 — not to mention that he would have *wanted* to hang around trying to get a line on the locket (and what are the bets that he already knew exactly who had purchased it by then, and was waiting for her to make a return trip?) then I think he may have put that projected trip off until after he had accomplished one or other of those goals. After all, the diadem had been there for close to 1000 years, it wasn't likely to turn up by accident before he went to find it.

He had all but certainly made one of his Horcruxes by the time we caught up to him with Hepzibah. Or at any rate, Rowling's insistence on pointing out his "elegantly wasted" appearance would appear to suggest as much.

One could also raise the argument that by that point his term of obligation to Burke had expired and he was now just a regular employee who could leave whenever he chose. It is a viable hypothesis that he was already making plans for the next stage of his campaign, having designated the Ring a "traveler's insurance policy" Horcrux, and hiding it in the Gaunt ruin in Little Hangleton against the hazards of his projected trip. He was certainly still young when that visit to Madam Smith took place. And he was not observed to still be wearing the Peverill ring. Having recently turned 21 seems as likely an age for him at that point as not. He was certainly not significantly older.

And waiting for Hepzibah to finally show up had paid off in spades. He bagged two founders' artifacts for the price of one! Now he just needed to find and collect the diadem and he would be nearly to his final goal (assuming that Albus wasn't

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just talking through his hat about Tom being fixated on Founders' objects, frankly, I'm inclined to suspect he was). By then, Tom may have known from rumor and legend that the Sword would eventually surface at Hogwarts. If the School could be pushed into the proper sort of a state of emergency, and he may have been confident of being able to manage that.

If this reasoning is on target, then we can tentatively pinpoint the time that Tom skipped out on wizarding Britain. As well as the time he returned with the Diadem to set up his interview with Albus, hoping to establish himself at Hogwarts and wait for the Sword to turn up as being some 10 years later. Even though we have no idea what he was doing in the 10 years between.

We certainly haven't been given information in canon of any activity which would have taken an additional 10 years.

Unless it took that long to *find* the ruddy diadem.

Which, upon consideration, it very well might have. If Helena stowed it in a hollow tree sometime back in the 11th century, it isn't likely to have still been *in situ*. That tree would have been long gone, and the diadem itself buried deep in several centuries worth of forest compost. It might be only by the merest chance that Tom managed to find it at all.

If Tom was about 21 at the time of Hepzibah's murder, with a hypothetical 7-year contract with Burke no longer in effect, the murder would have been around the summer of 1948. His return would have been perhaps the winter of '58-'59. (Minerva was hired as Transfiguration instructor in December of '56. Albus I am pretty sure had been serving as DADA instructor at that point.)



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I'll admit I'm not at all convinced about what Tom was waiting for before completing his projected set of six Horcruxes. Because I still do not believe that the Diary was intended as one of his original ones. There is no convincing reason for it to have been one of the planned ones.

When he had his interview with Albus, I believe he still needed two more to complete his projected collection of 6. We have been told fairly directly, in canon, that he would have been hoping for the Sword of Gryffindor to make a reappearance, so he could use that for one of them. Admittedly, we were told this by Albus, but I am inclined to think that Albus really believed this to be the case and there is a very good chance that he is right. I rather suspect that the Sword was fairly widely rumored to periodically turn up at Hogwarts in times of emergency. And I think that Tom would have felt himself perfectly capable of creating such an emergency once he was in place as the DADA instructor.

I do suspect the Sword had been incommunicado during most of the 19th and 20th centuries. The castle has probably not often been under direct attack in recent centuries, which is the sort of situation which has most likely always been required to cause the Sword to manifest. So Tom counted on being able to manage that, even if he was not aware that the Hat was the means used for its return.

The Sword of Gryffindor might have been his 5th planned Horcrux. But we don't get any clue of what he originally wanted to use for his last one.

I'm now inclined to think that after he was told about the Prophecy, he decided to expend his last, unassigned soul frag-

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ment on the diary as a tool to be used in order to get Albus out of his way at long distance, to use some other artifact for the Horcrux created by the death of the foretold child, and the Sword could go hang.

Although it is possible that by that time, that simply would be much too rational a plan for our Tom.



And in any event, it didn't work out that way, did it? For all that Albus may claim that *he* thinks that Tom intended to create his final Horcrux from the death of an infant Harry Potter at Godric's Hollow in 1981 — and that is certainly a theory which sounds in character for Tom — we have no idea what artifact he intended to use to house any such Horcrux at that point. We've heard of no artifact of note that had fallen into his hands by then, either. And we certainly *saw* no such artifact in the alleged flashback sequence wherein we are supposed to believe that we followed Tom to Godric's Hollow to kill the Potters. If Albus was ever right about that hypothesis, we have no explanation for why Rowling neither told nor showed us anything of the matter (frankly, I suspect she'd simply forgotten about it).

But the fact remains that you don't create a Horcrux by accident in the course of an ordinary murder. So, in this case, Albus seems to have been more on top of things than his author. Which would suggest that Tom had already given up on the plan to subvert the Sword of Gryffindor, for whatever was supposed to be created *instead* of the Harrycrux would have been his 6th Horcrux, and if Albus's theories were ever on the right track

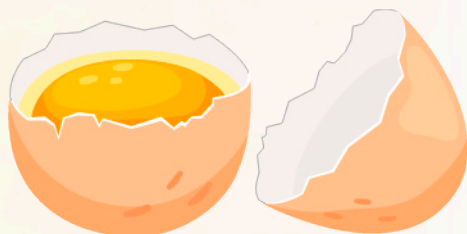
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of there being an Arithmantical significance of the *number* of horcruxes, Tom would have had no intention of exceeding that number of them.

Which certainly throws some light on a rather nagging question; in DHs, once our Tom had complete access to the school, and the sword of Gryffindor was *right there*, in the open, for the taking, why *didn't* he go ahead and turn it into a Horcrux if he was so determined to create one from artifacts from each of the founders? (Even if he inadvertently ended up using the fake sword instead of the real one.)

Had he discovered when he created the Nagini Horcrux that he had best not try that again since he was over his limit? Or had his creation of the Nagini Horcrux had already taken the last assigned slot in the projected series of six and he was determined not to exceed it?

And echo answers us nothing. The Sword of Gryffindor turns out to be been yet another totally dropped element from Tom's whole story arc. For Rowling appears to have completely forgotten that Tom ever had taken an interest in it. And evidently expects us to do the same.



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This particular limb is even thinner and more unstable than the ones to be found in the Out on a Limb group of essays, and of which it used to be a part.

The instability is not due to it having less in the way of textual support than the rest of them. This one actually has a pretty fair amount of canon support. But in order to get at it you have to dismiss, or at least be prepared to overlook, at least one canon statement of at least equal weight.

And it is not reassuring to reflect that to do this is far easier than it ought to be.



The problem, of course is that this is yet another case of Rowling and numbers. Finding ourselves in a place where we knowingly have to accept some of Rowling's numbers, dates, and calculations while deliberately overlooking others is not where we really want to be.

But we are already far too often forced to serve time there.

For example, Rowling's adoption of the 1960 birth date for the Marauder cohort, completely contradicts any way in which Sirius Black's statement that "the Lestranges" were a part of the gang of Slytherins that Snape ran with at school. Unless we also dismiss the dates on the Black family tapestry sketch. Which really does appear to be necessary. It also completely contradicts Remus's statement that James was still "only 15" at the time of our trip into the Pensieve to view Snape's worst memory. There is no way that he could still be 15 when sitting the OWLs in June if his birthday had been back in March.

But to dismiss a few of Rowling's numbers in this particular



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instance might give us a handle upon a heretofore irresolvable puzzle relating to the progress of VoldWar I.

Post-HBP, far too little of what we had been told about the course of VoldWar I still added up, and post DHs the situation has not improved. Over the first 4–5 books we were left to draft in the basic picture ourselves. Which, in most cases, usually resulted in filling in a sketch of a standard Evil Overlord, copied from a dozen other fantasy epics, attempting a routine campaign to overthrow the government by guerrilla action and quasi-military means. And while the various fan iterations didn't quite match up to everything said in the books there was more of a consensus than not.

It was a monumental edifice of a sandcastle, and one that collapsed as soon as the tide of HBP washed over it. There is very little manner in which the official Riddle backstory as presented in HBP can be adjusted to develop into the standard fanon extrapolation of Voldemort's first rise. The two pictures refuse to match up. The "enemy leader" model of fan expectations with his accompanying formerly broad public support and armies of allies simply fails to materialize in the face of HBP's overtly criminal gangster Boss.

This intractable lack of coherence is compounded in DHs when she has Regulus Black putting together fanboy scrapbooks of Voldemort's speeches. There is no way that the criminal leader as extrapolated and depicted in HBP would be out in public giving speeches. Certainly not speeches that the Ministry would permit to be printed. The best that one can do to try to resolve this particular conflict is to postulate that the speeches were reported in the PROPHEET in an attempt to bring

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the public awareness to just what kind of a threat they were under. But that isn't a very satisfactory explanation. In fact the whole insertion is completely implausible, as was most of the rest of the politics that were pasted on in DHs.

Even my latter day postulation of a "Lord Voldemort" scam presented as a deliberate hoax on the part of Tom Riddle and a handful of his ex-schoolmates in order to mock their elders, does not altogether explain it.

Yes, the Riddle of VoldWar I had allies. A few of them. Sorry specimens like the werewolves, who had really nothing to loose, and some Giants, who had joined up just for the hell of it. The Giants had been expelled from Britain decades earlier, and were a dwindling people with fewer than 100 or so of them remaining. A potential nuisance, certainly, but hardly a political force in the world. Apart from these he had only 4–6 dozen actual Death Eaters and a lake full of animate corpses. He didn't even have the Dementors during the first time around. They were the Ministry's.

And yet, with this mere scrap of a following (and the premise that we are apparently supposed to just accept that one wizard can control an undetermined number of Imperiused puppets all at the same time — which I flatly *don't*) he managed to bring most of the British wizarding world practically to its knees.

In scarcely more than 20 years. If even that long.
He has to have done it in stages.



And we have no openly stated dates for any of it. I very much doubt that Professor Binns's class ever gets to anything

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as current as VoldWar I (Hermione points out that Bagshott's 'HISTORY OF MAGIC' does not address the 20th century). It certainly doesn't do so at OWL-level. And I doubt many of Binns's students continue beyond the OWLs.

From the official Riddle backstory, acto Albus Dumbledore, there were several nasty incidents at Hogwarts which were never successfully tied to Riddle and his cronies.

There appear to have been no such reported incidents out in the broader ww during the period that Riddle was working at Borgin & Burkes. At least not until the death of Hepzibah Smith and the disappearance of at least two valuable artifacts from her collection. Clearly Riddle had not continued to rally his followers around for the purpose of getting up to various bits of amusing mayhem once they were all out of school. Riddle seems to have been working alone during this period, and when he works alone he is extremely circumspect.

He was also not seen for something like a decade after the death of Madam Smith. But he had already begun to reconnect with followers by the time he made an appointment to meet with Albus Dumbledore in order to ask for the vacant DADA position.

In that interview Albus spoke of rumors of Riddle's activities that he should have been sorry to believe were true. At this point we do not know whether Dumbledore spoke of acts that he had uncovered after speaking with Morin Gaunt in Azkaban, and in the investigation after the death of Madam Smith, or whether these were more recent rumors pertaining to incidents which had taken place since Riddle's (assumed to be recent) return to Britain. By this time Riddle appears to have already more-or-less publicly adopted the Lord Voldemort name and

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persona. So it is not impossible that Albus was merely chiding him over the hoax that he and his confederates were perpetuating on wizarding society.

We have no way to solidly fix the date of this interview, either. Our earliest calculation which conflated Minerva McGonagall's date of hire with Albus Dumbledore's appointment as Headmaster now appears to have been premature. The only clues we have is that when it took place Riddle was but recently returned to the ww after a 10-year absence, that he had still looked quite young shortly before that absence, and that the interview with Albus took place in winter. It might be safe to suppose the interview's possible date to be somewhere in the neighborhood of 1960, give or take some 2–3 years, but we cannot place it any more certainly than that.

From the other end of the equation, we have Cornelius Fudge assuring the Muggle Prime Minister, in the summer of 1996, that they had been attempting to catch this "terrorist leader" for nearly 30 years. Which would project the start of his first rise back to somewhere in the middle or late 1960s.

Or the *acknowledged* start of his rise. It may have taken the Ministry a while to admit they had a problem. But by the time the DEs had adopted the practice of sending up an illuminated Dark Mark over their handiwork, it would have been difficult for the Ministry to deny it.



We do have a few landmarks in the gap between Voldemort's return around 1960 and his first defeat in 1981, however. If you squint, between the lines, at least.

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First; Albus tells us that in the first years of Voldemort's rise there were a great many disappearances. And it does appear that it was some time before the Ministry woke up and realized that they had more on their hands than a string of unrelated nasty incidents and unresolved mysteries. Certainly if Fudge is correct and the Ministry only started attempting to catch him in the mid-to-late 1960s.

This "early" period therefore appears to have covered some years. It is likely that it was during this first, generally unexamined period that Riddle was doing his most insidious recruiting, gradually establishing his control over a handful of key followers that he had led while he was still at Hogwarts and convincing them to submit to what was effectively slavery.

This in itself was probably a work of years. Once accomplished, he would have gradually widened his net, reeling in a few other like-minded individuals who he regarded as desirable, who had not been among his schoolboy followers, probably because they were from other Houses, or other years, and others of similar mindset that his new recruits suggested to him among their younger siblings or cousins.

Many of the attacks which were taken part in during this period may have been along the lines of demonstrations to prospective followers, rewards and reassurances to current ones, elimination of prospective followers who didn't pan out, and a certain amount of personal payback for the benefit of various members of the whole company. This was probably the period at which the DEs actions were the most intensely personal overall. The purpose of the violence was not yet merely for the sake of terrorizing the public.



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Tom would not have been able to reel all of his original Hogwarts followers back, however, and for that matter he might very well not have wanted all of them back. Albus told us of a number of reasons why other schoolboys chose to follow Riddle. Not all of those reasons would have translated into producing effective Death Eaters.

But it would have been toward the end of this stage that he and his followers finally "went public" and the wizarding world first became aware of Death Eaters. It is uncertain whether the bogus "Lord Voldemort" of their earlier hoax was initially associated with the new terrorists on the block. But I am inclined to suspect he was not.

It was probably around this point that they adopted the Dark mark and started "signing their work." It would have been impossible for the Ministry to ignore and explain them away after that point. Whether or not he had yet publicly revealed himself, "Lord Voldemort" was now poised to make his name and establish his reputation.

Our next landmark is Albus's perishing "11 years" since anyone had dared to speak his adopted name. Which dates from the vantage point of November 1981. We know of *no* specific incident which took place around 1970. Rowling never gave us one inside of canon. But something appears to have taken place in or about that year which threw the entire wizarding world into a superstitious horror of mentioning Lord Voldemort by name, even in private.

What many readers appear to overlook is that by that time everyone *knew* his name. Or at least his *nom-du-crime*.

In November of 1981 Albus tells us that he has spent the



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past 11 years trying to get people to speak the name, since to refuse to do so gives that name unwarranted power. We can conclude from this statement that the *Ministry* had certainly never imposed any taboo which would register the speaking of that name during the first war. And I doubt that Tom, for all his supporters' wealth and backing had the resources to do so himself. He only seems to have done so in VoldWar II after he had the resources of the Ministry at his disposal (this device is, imho, another piece of DHs codswallop, but we'll let that detail pass for now).

Clearly by roughly 1970 everyone knew "of" Lord Voldemort. They all did indeed "know who" when his acts were referred to ever afterwards. He had made his name a household non-word. The Diary Revenant tells us that he had been determined to make that name feared. And he had succeeded.

Our third landmark is the year 1979.

For no acknowledged reason, either. But it keeps turning up like a *leit motif*. We don't know just what happened in 1979. But, unlike the events of 1970, we can make a few guesses.



The year 1979 turns out to have been brought up both in canon and outside of it far too often not to be significant in some manner.

The first reference to this year took place all the way back in PoA when, in the confrontation in the Shrieking Shack, Sirius Black tells us in passing that the Dark Lord has "been in hiding for 15 years."

Say what?

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Given Tom Riddle's, er... *striking* appearance, and the fact that his known activities were *illegal*, I should think he had been "in hiding" for a good deal longer than any 15 years. Nevertheless, 15 years is what we are told. Fifteen years back from June 1994, when that particular confrontation took place, comes out to 1979.

I have since been informed by a correspondent that this particular reference has been corrected in later editions of PoA to Voldemort being in hiding for 12 years. Which would match up to the period that he had existed in a disembodied state. I have not checked at a bookstore to confirm this information, but I have no reason to doubt it. Nor do I know just when the alleged correction was made. My copy of the book still says 15 years.

In any case, although the statement pointed me toward there being a possible anomaly regarding the year 1979, it is not information which is critically needed to support my resulting theory. Which remains as much in play as it ever was. Which, officially, is not at all.

Our next reference to the year 1979 inside canon comes in HBP, in the somewhat different confrontation in Spinner's End, wherein Snape tells us that, in contrast with Bella's useless gesture of sending herself off to Azkaban, he kept to his assigned post and had 16 years of information on Albus Dumbledore to welcome the Dark Lord home with.

Say what, again?

That particular confrontation took place in July 1996. But Snape is talking about Voldemort's return the previous year, in June 1995. Yup, 16 years back from 1995 comes to 1979.

This does not resolve the fact that 1979 was two years before Voldemort was defeated, and that if Snape was still working

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for him back then, as everyone tells us, why didn't he tell his master this information at the time? Is this retroactive information that he claims to have discovered after Voldemort's defeat? What else could it be?

And, given that this is Rowling, can we even be sure she really *means* 1979? Although we're stuck with it now. (Or until she makes another correction in a later edition of HBP.)

Speaking of which: our next references to 1979 come from outside actual canon; instead it is from the Black family tapestry sketch released for a charity auction in February 2006. Which is not really canon, even if it is really from Rowling. And there is a tremendous lot of waffling about whether to accept that at all since it already directly contradicts what she tells us in the books. In OotP Regulus Black's death was clearly indicated to have taken place in 1980. No one told Harry this, he saw it for himself, in writing.

On the tapestry.

On the tapestry sketch, this death is stated, in writing, as being in 1979.

Along with his father's. That was a surprise to everyone.

Now, in the wake of DHs and Kreachur's story, Regulus's death, if we accept his birth date as 1961, as it is shown on the tapestry sketch, he would have to have died in 1978, rather than 1979 in order to have taken the actions that Kreachur claims he did at the ages Kreachur claims he did them. In this instance it would be more to Rowling's usual pattern (i.e., spacing children in a family 2 years apart) to dismiss the 1961 birth date and conclude that he was born in 1962 instead. Which puts us onto a slippery slope indeed, and still contradicts OotP.

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Those fans who check the HP Lexicon site would have also noticed that at some point the Lexicon had adjusted the death date of the 3 Black sisters' father, Cygnus, from 1992 to 1979 as well. This is a development allegedly reflecting the information as rendered by the designers of the tapestry for the film version of OotP. We do not know where the film designers got their numbers. But that several other glitches and errors on the original sketch seem to have been retained in the film's version leaves one to question whether Rowling had anything to do with it at all. One would expect her to have corrected either all the most glaring errors or none of them.

And Regulus is still recorded as having died in '79.

I have finally taken the somewhat exasperated stance of deciding that what is *IN* the books is in the books, and what is not in the books is *not* in the books and if it contradicts the books, then to hell with it.

In the books Reggie died in 1980. If, as we are told *in the books*, he was 17 at the time of his death, then he was born in 1963.

So, given all the repeated clankers that keep sending us to this particular year; even setting the death dates for three of the Black family's men aside, what on earth could have happened in the war against Voldemort in 1979? Do we know? Have we got any kind of a hint?

Well, actually, yes, we have.



Sirius Black originally told us that Voldemort has been "in hiding" since that date. We might do well to dismiss this statement now, but it might not be a bad time to also reflect upon

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what kind of thing might send a wanted criminal into hiding, or, rather, *deeper* into hiding?

It might be a good idea right about now to remember that Sirius Black also tells us that toward the end of the war Barty Crouch Sr, as Head of the DMLE, had authorized additional new powers to Aurors. Specifically the right to kill rather than capture. Also that he authorized the use of Unforgivable curses against suspects..

To a great deal of public acclaim.

Ladies and gentlemen, I propose that this escalation in Ministry policy may very well have taken place in 1979.

Why? Why *then*, specifically?

Well, maybe it has something to do with another piece of information that we have been handed, more than once, and which appears to make no sense on the face of it.

By the time he fell, everyone believed that Voldemort was winning.

To this point there is nothing even remotely "extreme" about this statement. It has full canon support. But even though by the final days of his first rise Voldemort had built his Death Eaters up to about 60 or so, along with an unspecified number of unmarked sympathizers, Imperiused puppets, and persons who had been bullied or tricked into doing as they were told, there is really no way in which one can account for him having the leverage to have been winning this war in which the wizarding world was engaged.

I think we are overlooking something. And this missing piece has to be information that we already have access to. What is more, since the progress of VoldWar I is unlikely to be central

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to the problem of winding up VoldWar II. Rowling is never going to backtrack and connect this particular dot for us.

And it finally occurred to me to wonder whether the missing piece of this puzzle might not be Barty Crouch Jr.



Once the possibility finally occurred to me, the more I think about it, the more I think Barty Jr could have been THE key to the shift of the war. Had Rowling thought to handle his story only slightly differently we would have been aware of it. The Tale of Two Crouches might not have been just a little domestic tragedy on the sidelines. It could have been central to the whole progress of the war itself.

The only problem with this theory even as it stands is that Barty Crouch Jr has been set up as being too young to have had anything to do with the progress of the war itself.

Or was he? Was he *really*?

I'll admit that a proper date for the Longbottom affair would come in awfully handy about this time. We've been told that it took place long enough after the defeat of Voldemort that the ww was beginning to feel safe again. I think it is unlikely that it could have been more than a year after the defeat. Indeed, I used to think that the attack on the Longbottoms might have even taken place on the anniversary of that defeat.

But we cannot be sure, and it doesn't have to have been. It could, in fact, have been within a couple of months of the attack on the Potters. Or even weeks. Given that the guiding force behind that attack was Bellatrix, I doubt that *she* would have had the restraint to have left the matter alone for more

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than a few days.

But you really don't get any impression from the way the matter is presented in the books that there was any great mystery about who the culprits were (particularly not if the Lestranges were set up by someone else). Even not fully compos mentis the Longbottoms were able to identify their attackers. And while the Pensieve 4 did get a trial, I don't get the impression that anyone ran around looking for extenuating circumstances or conflicting evidence. Kangaroos with gavels isn't the half of it.

I also am given to understand that even with due course, a trial in Britain is likely to be held reasonably soon after an arrest. (Unlike some areas on this side of the pond.) So the 4 were probably imprisoned not long after the attack.

So, say the Longbottoms were attacked in November of 1981 (which we don't know, but is at least a possibility), the Pensieve four could have been in Azkaban by New Year. Or the attack, arrest and trial could have been at a point even earlier than that (well, within reason).

For that matter, on her official website (the old one) Rowling stated that the Lestranges were *sent* to attack the Longbottoms. And we have no clear idea what she meant by that statement. We do not know whether Bellatrix sent them all herself in service of some off-the-wall theory of her own, or whether she herself had been set up by someone else. And we are unlikely to ever be told.

Or rather it might be better to hope that we will *not* be told, for Rowling never improves a muddle when she starts explaining things. She invariably makes it worse.

As I state elsewhere, if the four were set up by someone else,

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my vote goes to Lucius Malfoy. He, after all, is the one who most benefited. By the end of 1981, Regulus and Orion Black were dead and Sirius was in Azkaban. Whether or not Cygnus Black, Malfoy's father-in-law, was also dead by then was irrelevant, it would have been obvious that after some 700 years the Black family name was soon to be extinct in the male line. And the family's holdings would ultimately devolve upon Malfoy's wife's branch of the family. With one of Narcissa's older sisters already disowned, only Bellatrix, and any future offspring of hers, stood between the Black inheritance ultimately passing to his own wife and infant son.

There is also the factor that after having managed to narrowly escape imprisonment on an Imperius defense himself, having his maniac of a sister-in-law running about at liberty simply was not safe. For anybody.

And what *about* that Imperius defense? For that matter what about the Lestranges having managed to "talk their way out of Azkaban" in the first place? Does Crouch Sr sound like the sort of fellow who would have hesitated to pack the Malfoy heir or the Lestranges off to Azkaban in the face of halfway convincing evidence? And the devil with who their families were.

But what if they, one and all, threatened to expose his own son's involvement with the "Dark Order"? Did he cut a deal with the Lestranges, or Malfoy's father in return for their silence?

For that matter, would Crouch have even believed their threats? If the kid was only 19 at the time of his imprisonment, as Sirius Black says that he appeared to be, he would have been barely a year out of Hogwarts before Voldemort fell. At most. And since the Dark marks had disappeared by then, there was

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nothing to conclusively prove that the kid had ever had one.

Would Crouch — who appears to have been positioning himself for even higher office — have cut a deal merely to avoid a scandal over an accusation that he didn't believe, but which couldn't be proved a lie, and which it would be political suicide to allow to break loose?

Because if Barty Jr was really only just out of Hogwarts in June of '80, as *appears* to be the case, it is awfully easy to believe that he was every bit as much of an innocent pawn as he claimed to be at his trial.

And we all know that he wasn't.



You could certainly make an argument that he was. That he was as much a fantasist as poor Stan Shunpike (although perhaps it is time to consider that the conductor of the Knight Bus might make a very useful informant to the DEs. Imperius not even required). That after being dragged into the Longbottom affair for spite by Bellatrix in an attempt to avoid prosecution if caught, or to make sure that she wasn't going down without doing her enemies some collateral damage, his mind could have broken in Azkaban and he really believed that his father was his enemy and that Voldemort would protect him. Ten years a prisoner in his father's house, held under Imperius wouldn't have helped matters.

But it really doesn't fly. No, we have to conclude that young Barty was indeed a Death Eater.

I'm no longer convinced that he was only 19. I suspect he was more like 20.



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Sirius's statement concerning the matter is odd on the face of it. He claims to have seen him brought into the prison along with his cousin, her husband, and her brother-in-law. Claiming "he couldn't be a day older than 19."

Excuse me, but why "19"? How does the appearance of a 19-year-old differ from that of an 18-year-old. Or a 20-year-old for that matter? Is this another case of Rowling giving us a solid sounding number that just doesn't add up? All we can really say is that by wizarding standards he was obviously a very *young* adult.

Sirius Black isn't our only source of information on this issue, of course. Harry caught a glimpse of young Barty in the Pensieve at the time of his sentencing, and Harry also placed him in his late teens by appearance. Thin, a mop of fair hair, and freckles. A very boyish-looking boy he sounds like. But he might have been just a bit older than he appeared. Once a youngster has his full growth it becomes harder to estimate exact age.

Sirius Black's statement also ought to tip us off that despite a traceable, rather tenuous family connection Sirius didn't know the Crouches well enough to have any clear idea that Barty Crouch, Head of the DMLE, had a son, or how old the boy was supposed to be. Nor, it appears, that he had ever taken any notice of the boy while they were still at Hogwarts. For all that their time there would have *had* to have overlapped.

This is no more than might be expected if we went by the 1958 Marauder's birth year reckoning that I had previously drafted out in response to the tapestry sketch, and Barty had been no more than a 3rd year in Sirius's final year. But with the 1960 birth date for the Marauders that Rowling put into DHs it becomes harder for their mutual time at school not to have overlapped enough



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for them to have at least known what year the other was in.

Mind you, by the time we were hearing all this, Sirius's memory probably wasn't all it should have been. But the Pensive 4 seem to have been sentenced soon enough after Sirius's own imprisonment for their identities to have stuck. Even though Barty was believed to have died within a year.

If Barty was the age Sirius says he appeared, he might have been in the same year as Sirius's own brother. And once this suggestion is made, things start getting interesting. The more so in that act to the timeline given in Kreachur's story Regulus had to have been a couple of years younger than he is stated to be on the tapestry sketch for his death to have happened when Kreachur claims. (And then for his death to have taken place either during the summer or a term break, for Reggie was still in school when he died.)

For one thing, I think even Sirius might have noticed Barty if he was one of Regulus's close friends. And if Sirius never noticed Barty at Hogwarts, then what year or what House was he in? Sirius ought to have noticed anyone in his own year, at least in passing. He ought to have noticed anyone his brother hung out with regularly, even if only to the point of knowing who they were. So on the face of it, the chances of Barty being in another year or another House seem fairly good.

But if Barty wasn't a Slytherin, how did Tom get his hooks into him? It's the Slyths who are still in school who were Tom's most active recruiters.

Well, regardless of what House he was in, there was one place where Reggie and Barty and any number of other "collectible" kids might have interacted, even if they were not in

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the same House or the exact same year.

The Slug Club.

Which Sirius blew off completely.

12 OWLs and the son of the head of the DMLE (and his father quite possibly the grandson of the first Arcturus Black, i.e., the great-grandson of the headmaster who probably hired Slughorn?), of course Barty would have been in the Slug Club. And so would Regulus Black.

All completely off Sirius's radar.



Yes, that's probably where Barty was hooked. They caught him mid-way through a snit of adolescent rebellion and whoever hooked him was persuasive. Of course he may not have actually been reeled in while school was in session. Students have families too. In fact, I think that was the whole point.

Barty's family.

Whoever caught him sounds like they could be formidable, and we've met few DEs who could fit the bill. Such a coup would have also put them pretty high in Riddle's favor.

I refuse to consider Snape. Snape wouldn't have had the leverage. Or the family connections, either. But Snape at least demonstrated that he knew who Barty Crouch Jr was. Even though he hadn't seen him in a dozen years and had believed him to be dead for most of that time. Of course Snape was alive and at liberty throughout all of the ramifications of the Longbottom affair as well. Little as it might have held his interest, given that this would have been after Halloween '81.

(And, besides, if Snape had had anything to do with recruit-

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ing Barty, you'd think he'd have made a clean admission of it to Albus after he turned his coat, and Albus would not be claiming to Harry that he had no idea whether or not Barty was a DE, or indeed might not have sat on the information during the most critical period of the war.)

Assuming that Slughorn reserved his Friday evening club for 5th years and up (we heard of no one younger being invited to those get-togethers. Younger students may have been treated to a Sunday afternoon tea back when Sluggy was Head of Slytherin), that would have Regulus finally invited to one of Sluggy's little "get-togethers" after Snape and the Marauders had left school. He and Snape would have known one another prior to that but it isn't necessary to assume that they were anything like friends. If Barty were a year or two ahead of Reggie the same goes for him.

With the 1960 Marauders' birth year that Rowling has now formalized, Reggie would be three years behind them.

Actually, if Barty were in the same year as Reggie (whatever year that happened to be), that would make it even easier to connect this pair of phantom dots. But that scenario no longer quite works. Reggie didn't live to finish Hogwarts, and, if I am right, Barty was already earning his kudos from the Dark Lord by then.

It could have been Bella who influenced both of them in Riddle's favor through her connection to Regulus. Off the school grounds, since by then Bella was long out of school. And Sirius was no longer a member of the Black family.

Bella having been the recruiter who bagged young Barty, might explain some of the favor Tom granted her. It could also be how she knew about Barty's involvement when it was time

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to talk her way out of Azkaban in the first place, or to call him in to help attack the Longbottoms.



And I'm not convinced that Barty's enlistment was random, either. Tom would have *wanted* Barty if he could get him. He would have wanted him as a source of information on what his father was up to. I am not sure Tom would have chosen to casually risk such a key player by exposing him to discovery out in raids, either. Particularly once he was out of school and living in his father's house. I'm not sure what use the boy would have actually been while at Hogwarts. But Tom *does* make exceptions. Just getting young Barty's commitment early would have been worthwhile.

Y'know. If I were Tom, I'd take care that not many people, even inside my own organization, knew about Barty being a member of the club. I might even deliberately leave him unmarked and have him contact me by owl, or through intermediaries. On my side through a trusted acolyte who knows about the boy. On his side, through someone whose discretion and whose loyalties were already assured. Someone who could Apparate anywhere on call. Someone like a devoted family House Elf. A pity Winky is still keeping her masters' secrets.

It's possible only Bella, in her privileged position as a favorite (and enlisting Barty may be why she was such a favorite), knew that Tom had Crouch's own son in his pocket. And it was only after Voldemort's disappearance that she played that particular card, and lost it. Rather as Lucius lost the Diary. Although her motivations were much easier for Tom to have accepted.

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I really do think Barty may have been just a *little* older than Sirius and Harry said he looked.

And it's very easy to postulate that the attack on the Longbottoms was in November or December of '81.

And if that is the case, it now appears that he may have had an even higher degree of his father's trust than we have been led to suspect. Because the way so much of the action seems to be devolving on 1979 (and I may be wrong about that, but it sure did look like it, and it looked like it for quite a while) it sounds as if Voldemort suddenly got a major advantage around then, which resulted in Crouch's shoot-to-kill policy, in reaction.

Which means that we may need to take another look at Sirius's summary of the Tale of Two Crouches and be prepared to accept the possibility that Sirius was talking through his hat. Again.

Because a sullen kid who slouches about openly resenting his father wouldn't have been able to get away with that. And if there is one thing we learned about Barty Crouch the younger in GoF, it is that he was a superb actor.

And in our final glimpse of Crouch Sr when he turned up at Hogwarts, after his escape, fighting off Imperius, and disoriented as to when he was, he sounded inordinately proud of his clever son, with his 12 OWLs. (In reality, he was fighting to get the information out that his son was at the middle of the plot being played out at Hogwarts. Albus got the message, but as usual, he sat on it and took no action when it might have made a difference.)

If Barty was spying on his father (and we don't know how closely. Was he actually *working* with his father in the DMLE by then? With his 12 OWLs I suspect he might have started there

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right out of school), then he was in a position to be passing on highly sensitive information about the Ministry's operations. By 1979, between Barty in the Ministry and (possibly) Peter in the Order, Tom had his opposition well and truly buffaloes. He had them covered, coming and going.

And Barty Jr really was Voldemort's most valuable servant. And he had been from the day he signed up.



But as to the "received version" according to Sirius Black: Sirius quite clearly TELLS us in GoF that he only pieced this story together after he escaped — a dozen years after it all happened. And what he gives us is the "conventional wisdom" of a cold, neglectful father and a resentful son. A quite startlingly generic account of this particular tragedy — which really is beginning to look not at all generic..

I suspect that may be a false trail. Sirius had other fish to fry during his two years on the run. He certainly wasn't devoting much of his time investigating the history of the Crouches. Even if he did only piece it together once he was away from the Dementors, I think his reading of the Crouches could be something he had already made his mind up about before he escaped.

He had been picking up what the DEs had to say of the story back in Azkaban, and they didn't know the truth. Most of them probably didn't even know whether Crouch Jr really was on board or not. Moreover, Crouch was only there for a year and then presumably died. It was a conveniently sad thought, so the Dementors left it to them and it gave them all something to talk about. A useful distraction that they probably colored to their own speci-

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fications. And it is all likely to have drifted considerably from the facts according to each individual's spin on it. Sirius admits he only started trying to sort it out after he was well away from the place. It's small wonder that it comes across as a generic cautionary tale of which the whole point seems to be the inhumanity of Barty Crouch Sr. I'm beginning to suspect Crouch Sr was all *too* human.



Which brings us back to the problem of Regulus Black. Acto Kreachur, a year after signing on with Lord Voldemort, Reggie had his trust abused by his Master, secretly turned his coat, and effectively suicided before he could spread any kind of information at all. Had *he* any input on the Crouch conundrum?

Barty's loyalties were personal rather than ideological, and even if Reggie had learned of and told him about Riddle's halfblood status I don't think it would have mattered to Crouch.

But if Reggie *had* been roped into the DEs with Barty, which is at least a possibility, since, if Regulus did join up at 16, (in 1979) after Orion died and would have had nothing to say in the matter, it might have been about the same time they caught Barty. In that case, it suddenly becomes all the more important that at the first hint of wavering, Reggie be neutralized before he could tell anyone else who Voldemort's source of sensitive Ministry information was. Ergo; we *might* have even been handed a reason for Tom to really have ordered Reggie's death — which we know now he never did, and we haven't a clue as to why Sirius and Remus should have ever thought he had. All of which renders any of their statements on the matter in OotP and HBP completely bogus.

However, taking a reality check; Rowling *also* didn't think of

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any of this and she is much too far down the road to go back and retrofit any of it in.

And the more I look at it, the more I suspect that this is all just another one of Rowling's missed opportunities.

With one *minor* adjustment, like an actual 1981 date for the attack on the Longbottoms, and a vague "looked about 20" age for Barty, we would have a potential bombshell here. I really do think that this matter was a thoroughly wasted opportunity on Rowling's part, because, even as things stand, if you overlook Sirius's comment on Barty's apparent age when sentenced all kinds of dangling ends in the backstory get neatly tied off.

But she botched it by once again giving us solid-sounding numbers that simply don't add up to anything worth having. If Sirius had said he looked like he couldn't have been over 20 we would have had all the leeway we need. Because for it to really play correctly, he needs to be between Sirius and Regulus in age. And I am fairly convinced that Rowling just sketched the whole Crouch backstory in without any real consideration for development. She didn't realize what a gift she had to work with in them.



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Oh, the walking dead are on the march.

This started out as yet another theory that ended up being hosed by DHs, thereby qualifying it for the 7th Son sub-collection But I haven't moved it there.

Not that I ever had any real confidence in Rowling following through on this possibility in the first place, although she was the one who originally raised the issue that led to it. But then, deliberately raising issues that she never bothers to address is one of Rowling's long-standing failings. Instead she took a left turn at the fork and ended up going nowhere near what I (or so far as I know, anyone else) had tentatively drafted out.

However, even though one fairly major part of the reasoning didn't pan out, quite a bit of the rest is still valid. And even the bits that aren't might be useful as fic fodder.



A long-ago promise that we would find out that what Harry's parents did was "important" is only one of the statements that Rowling dropped on us years ago and never followed up on.

Around about February of 2007 it finally penetrated that one of the possibilities for Book 7 was that the other shoe might finally drop regarding the Longbottoms. Rowling had already poked at least one domino in that particular layout with her question about the significance of Harry's Cloak. Quite a number people had speculated that Frank had been using the Cloak to keep a watch on the comings and goings in Godric's Hollow.

Which in turn directed some of the fandom's attention back



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to the attack on the Longbottoms.

And, no, I still didn't believe in MemoryCharmed!Neville. But Rowling had definitely, and publicly told us on her first official website, at some point during the 3-year summer, that the Lestranges and Barty Jr had been *sent* after Frank and Alice Longbottom. And she never rescinded that statement. Nor did she ever explain what she meant by it.

It couldn't have been Voldemort who sent them. He was already gone by then.

We'd also long ago been told that the Pensieve Four attacked the Longbottoms, trying to discover Lord Voldemort's whereabouts.

Why should Bellatrix Lestrange have believed that the Longbottoms might know Lord Voldemort's whereabouts?

Or, perhaps, as we were led to believe up until OotP, why should she think that *Frank* Longbottom might know Voldemort's whereabouts. It was only in OotP that Alice was suddenly identified as being another Auror, rather than just Frank's wife. (It was only in OotP that Rowling woke up and started depicting witches — other than Rita Skeeter or Poppy Pomfrey — actually working for a living in any field aside from teaching or shopkeeping.)

It's a question worth asking.

Of course, as usual, one doesn't ask those sorts of questions until a possible answer seems to be hovering somewhere around the horizon.



But, looking back to early 2007:

At that point it was finally time to reflect that Bellatrix



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almost certainly knew about the Horcruxes. Or at least she knew about *one* of them. It's turned out since then, that she'd been given custody of it, after all.

For that matter, Reggie knew about one of them too. That kind of information may (or may not) have traveled in either direction. But the statement we heard Bella make at her sentencing, now that we'd all got the proper context to interpret it, makes it more than likely that she was no more convinced that Voldemort was dead than Dumbledore was, and for much the same reason.

But the fly in this particular pot of ointment is that at that point I had thought that the Horcrux that Bella had been given instructions to hide had been the Locket. And that she'd been instructed to hide it in the Inferi cave. That she, instead, had been entrusted with the Cup and had stashed it in her own vault at Gringotts disallowed my whole original line of reasoning.

And until Rowling finished off the series and shut down such speculation, I had wondered if there might be some goofy idea that if you can find one of the accursed things, you can call the owner to you. If that was the case, she'd have built Tom a new simulacrum in a New York minute, and he'd have been back in next to no time.

Well it kind-of makes sense doesn't it? And, given the behaviour of the Diary Revenant, it doesn't seem to be *altogether* wrong, either.

Unfortunately I don't think Rowling believes Horcruxes work that way. And besides, Rowling quite clearly doesn't think so, or she wouldn't have given Bellatrix the Cup for safekeeping. After all, why torture the Longbottoms for information on

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Voldemort's whereabouts when all you need to do is make a trip to your own vault at Gringotts to bring him back, yourself? So much for that speculation.



But, as I say, looking back at exploded theories — in connection with my musings about Reggie and the sea cave, I had postulated that it had been Bellatrix who had been entrusted to hide the Locket in the sea cave. And that on the basis of that:

After the Dark Lord's disappearance in 1981, Bellatrix got the somewhat loony idea (or maybe not so loony) that if she could recover the Horcrux, she could restore the Dark Lord.

ETA: well, as to that, she *could* have. Or at least restore a *version* of him. And she'd have willingly paid the price of her own life to do it, too. But she never got fully informed of *that*.

To this end she makes another trip to the sea cave. The potion balks her efforts at retrieving the locket. But in the course of the attempt, she makes another (to her) horrible discovery.

The potion in the basin is not truly opaque. It is luminescent, and it is reflective. Highly reflective. Once she douses her own Lumos and allows her eyes to adjust to the darkness, the glow of the potion eventually illuminates what is in the basin.

And it is *not* the Slytherin Locket.

She has been duped. The Locket she placed in the basin was not the Locket she had boasted to Regulus that the Dark Lord had entrusted her to hide.

And by 1981 Reggie was no longer around to be questioned.

And she can no longer get access to the House at #12. Walburga has made it inaccessible to her.

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She is stymied.



Following this line of reasoning a bit further; she isn't ready to give up. But she hasn't very many avenues of inquiry left to pursue. By 1981 the Black family has dwindled alarmingly. But there are still a couple of possibilities for her to explore. We do not know whether Ignatius and Lucretia Prewett (and Arcturus, who was probably living with them) had a nasty experience during this period. Ignatius's two nephews, or perhaps, cousins, were already dead at DE hands, so it is possible that Bellatrix was balked there as well, and did not have any expectations of being able to convince Lucretia or Arcturus that they needed to assist her. Old Auntie Cassiopeia is a member of her own branch of the family, and doesn't know anything to the purpose, and Bellatrix already knew that the house at #12 was inaccessible to her.

Which left only distant cousin Callidora Longbottom.

Yes, that's right. Longbottom. Which, through association, might have given her some fresh ideas.

Callidora Longbottom *née* Black. Born 1915 (and, acto the tapestry sketch in 2006, still alive). This lady is quite possibly Frank Longbottom's grandmother, if the sort of early marriages we've been shown from time to time in the series are characteristic. Neville's Gran, the Augusta Longbottom whose Hogwarts career Minerva remembers so vividly would be her daughter-in-law.

Rowling did, after all, tell us that the Lestranges were *sent* after the Longbottoms.



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She doesn't tell us by whom.

She doesn't tell us *why* they were sent after the Longbottoms *specifically*, either.



And now let's ask the question that nobody has made an issue of yet.

Who, precisely, were the Longbottoms, back when they still knew their own names?

There was more than one reason for someone to have been a member of the Order of the Phoenix, you know:

- 1 You might have escaped the attentions of the DEs three times.
- 2 You might be an associate of Albus Dumbledore

Those categories aren't mutually exclusive. While I can't really see Hagrid or Mundungus Fletcher escaping the DEs 3 times, I don't have any problem with the idea that, say, Alastor Moody, might have qualified on both counts. Maybe so did Frank and Alice Longbottom.

(ETA: as I've recently postulated in a couple of the other essays in this collection, I've since come around to the conclusion that while Albus may have founded the Order of the Phoenix, it was Alastor Moody who actually ran it. Therefore, some of the members may well have been recruited because they were Alastor's protégés. Which could explain all of the Order members who were active Aurors.)

Plus, Albus did sound particularly bitter when he eventually told Harry what became of the Longbottoms, didn't he? And yet old Augusta is still one of Albus's biggest fans, despite it all.



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And she is in tight with Griselda Marchbanks who is an even bigger fan. I really do begin to suspect that the Longbottom family and Albus Dumbledore may go back a long way socially and may have been even closer associated 15-20 years ago than anyone has ever bothered to inform Harry.

But that's only a part of the equation.

Albus also tells us that he and Harry are the only two people who [ought to] know the full text of the Trelawney Prophecy.

At that point I doubted the same limitation went for knowing about the Horcruxes. For example; until DHs gave us strong indication otherwise, I was pretty sure that Snape knew about those, and knew exactly what kind of information he was inside the DEs organization to try to find. Rowling has since shut down that line of inquiry as well. And given us nothing of value to replace it with.

But by then I was beginning to wonder whether Frank and Alice had also been in the know, and were following leads to them, once Snape reported that Voldemort was giving a few selected individual, high-ranking followers some sensitive missions.

Ultimately, I seem to have been wrong about that, too.



On the other hand, we also have no reason to suppose that the Longbottoms were not still on social terms with the Black family, even if their politics were not what Pollux Black's branch of the family agreed with. The Longbottoms had been considered eligible marriage partners for the Black family's daughters, within living memory after all.

And two of the younger Longbottoms are Aurors. Who can

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make Walburga open the door to them.

In fact, those *particular* two of the younger Longbottoms are Aurors; who also have a perfect excuse to be rooting out Dark artifacts for Albus Dumbledore, who is known to be a friend of their family.

In fact, they are members of Dumbledore's bloody Order.

This might have prompted Bellatrix to connect a few phantom dots of her own. It is possible that since she knows that her Master suddenly decided to entrust her to hide his Horcrux she may have leaped to the conclusion that he knew that someone was *looking* for it. Bellatrix, after all, did not know about the Prophecy. Or by all accounts, she didn't know about it *then*.

She might have also remembered that Lord Voldemort had shown an interest in the Longbottoms around the same time he was interested in the Potters. She doesn't have the context to understand that this interest was because of the babies.

But it still wouldn't have been Voldemort who sent the Lestranges and Barty Jr after Frank and Alice Longbottom. Like I say, he was already gone by then.



Over here where I am standing, in the land of *Qui Bono?*, I'm not altogether convinced that Bellatrix connected those dots in quite that pattern entirely on her own. She may have had... encouragement.

From somebody who, ironically, hadn't a clue about the Horcruxes. Even though he had also been given custody of one of them.

However, Lucius may have also had some awareness of

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Voldemort having taken an earlier interest in the Longbottoms.

Yes, indeed. My vote for possible instigator at this point *always* goes to Lucius Malfoy.

Malfoy's position was precarious enough already. He had eluded Azkaban on an Imperius defense, but Bellatrix was a security risk on two feet, and far too much of a loose canon to be permitted to run around at large, unimpeded. And inside canon, there is no reason to believe that there was ever any love lost between Lucius and Bellatrix. I think they have always been rivals.

Besides, there was also the little matter of what remained of the Black family's holdings. Which were now apparently up for grabs.



By the end of 1981; around when we are invited to assume that the attack on the Longbottoms took place; according to the revised tapestry dates, the only members of the Black family left alive and at liberty were some half a dozen members of the older generations, and Cygnus's three daughters. The heir, Sirius was in Azkaban and he was not coming out alive. Indeed, one rarely survived all that long in Azkaban, so the clock was ticking. The older generation would eventually all die off too, and the property would ultimately devolve upon the sisters.

And one of the sisters was already disowned, and out of the succession, so, of no further interest.

Leaving only (still childless) Bellatrix standing between all of the Black family holdings ultimately devolving upon Lucius's own wife and infant son.

Lucius Malfoy wants the very best for his family.



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He will do whatever it takes to get it.

Encouraging Bellatrix to go ahead and make a fool of herself is a doodle.



However, now, over a decade down the track from the release of DHs, a question has been raised which actually proposes a possible answer to our recalcitrant question of why target the Longbottoms?

Admittedly, it doesn't get us any forwarder on the question of who it was who "sent" the Lestranges after them, but it does at least raise a viable reason as to *why*.

At the end of CoS, Albus is grandly "Explaining It All," as usual, and drops the information in passing that Tom is back lurking in Albania.

How did he know that?

Yet another Never-Asked-Question, eh?

And it needs to be asked.

Who was it, after all, that told Albus about Tom's Albanian connection?

For that matter; why is it that at whenever Tom suffers a crushing defeat, he always high-tails it off to Albania?

As of CoS Albus seems to have already known that Tom was back there again. But Albus also appears to be completely out of the loop regarding any association between Tom Riddle and the Albanian nation. Hardly surprising, since there appears to be no such connection. The only connection between them is still believed to have been the Ravenclaw diadem. Tom spent anything up to a decade in Albania looking for the ruddy



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diadem. But Albus wasn't ever informed of that.

Well, I think I have at least a *possible* answer to why he keeps going to ground there.

He owns property there.

He was in that region for something like a decade during the period he was looking for the diadem. He wasn't wandering around the countryside like an itinerant monk. I think he had managed to acquire a piece of property, with a house of some sort, and had established a base that he worked out of. On his return after '81, he may have been riding snakes in a forest, but I suspect that there was a house available for him to find as comfortable a nest as could be managed in the foundations.

And that house probably had the reputation of being haunted during the times between snakes.

For that matter, some of his earliest followers, who had returned, or come to the UK with him back when he was asking for the DADA position may have been aware of that place, and had no reason not to mention it over the 20 years or so between his first return and his first defeat. Therefore, Pettigrew probably had a destination for his own search, which makes their whole meet-up rather less coincidental.

It certainly isn't completely off the wall that Peter might have known that Tom once **had** a base in Albania. Even if he knew no more than that it was in a forested area. It would be a lot easier to imagine him going off to look for a house rather than to go wandering at random hoping to stumble across a specific *snake*. At worst — or maybe that's "at best" — the property would provide a place for **Peter** to go to ground and be safe from pursuit.

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I would imagine that land records can be magically altered, and probably fairly easily. I really doubt that Tom paid down money, or brought a legitimate lawsuit to court to get possession of either the Riddle, OR the Gaunt properties. But it seems pretty evident that he did, in fact, own them. I'd say that there is probably a crumbling villa somewhere in Albania with a bad enough reputation that people know about it, but no one much goes there.

But Albus never admits to being aware of that. He didn't even claim to know that one of the Horcruxes was the Ravenclaw diadem. Or at least he never admitted to it. Not a hint, not a single bloody clue. I rather think that Albus may have been out of that particular loop.

So, without that missing piece of context, what put Albus onto the idea that Tom might be hiding out in Albania?

Well it certainly wasn't anyone who was approaching the problem from the standpoint of hunting the Horcruxes, or Albus might have been a bit less clueless than he was. And I very much doubt that the Order or most of its members were in any position to come across such information, either. So that pretty much leaves either one of Albus's other agents, or the Ministry.

Snape was already teaching at Hogwarts by then, and still in contact with at least some of the remaining DEs who escaped prosecution. But his main contact seems to have been Malfoy who not only knew nothing about the Horcruxes, but by all indications was the first actual DE in his family.

If one removes any awareness or consideration of the diadem from the equation the only hint one is left with is the fact that Tom spent several years abroad in his youth, mostly in Albania, and that it was only upon his return to Britain that he started contacting his

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old school chums and putting together a terrorist organization.

So who knew that?

Well the 2nd-generation DEs all seem fairly unlikely candidates. Which leaves Bella and her contemporaries right out of it. The new recruits like Snape and possibly even Malfoy were in an even less knowledgeable position. The Lestrangle brothers, and young Avery, and Evan Rosier, however might have at least heard a few stories from their fathers.

Except that I don't think they did. I rather doubt that Tom was at all communicative about exactly where he had been and what he had been doing, after he returned to Britain and started sending out lures to his old school friends. He might even have been at some pains to give the impression that he had merely been off on an extended version of a traditional "grand tour."

So who does that leave?

How about the followers that he brought back to Britain with him?

There weren't many of those. But there seem to have been one or two.

And, of course they knew nothing of *why* Tom had been knocking about in Albania. They only knew that he had been there, because that's where they joined up with him. Any of them might well have mentioned such a property there.

I think it might be interesting to run a check back through the records of the Albanian Ministry's DMLE for the years of, say, around 1948–1963 or thereabouts. I suspect that you might turn up some incidents which would prove... suggestive.

And who is most likely to have been the ones with the authority to do that?

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How about the British Ministry?

Which employed the Longbottoms.

Bingo.



Barty Crouch had accepted Karkaroff's offer to make a plea bargain. And I think that once he was willing to talk, Igor found himself questioned and questioned again, and questioned yet a third time, or even more, regarding his entire association with the wizard formerly known as Lord Voldemort, before he was finally turned loose and allowed to shake the dust of Great Britain from his feet. And someone in Crouch's Department would have probably been involved in the questioning, and someone else would have been set to verifying this testimony.

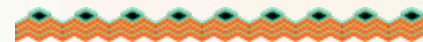
I suspect that enough turned up in the investigation to indicate that, yes, Lord Voldemort probably did start his career back in Albania. There may be any number of nasty unsolved cases in the Albanian records.

This might not have telegraphed that Tom would necessarily have returned there, but it at least gave Albus some place to start looking. And not impossibly to have set up some kind of a monitoring device. Possibly placed by Fawkes.

And I really do think that his informant may have been Frank Longbottom.

Which it would be easy enough for somebody who might have at least limited access to the DMLE's records to verify. Like, oh just maybe, the Head of the Department's son.

And Longbottom, unlike Karkaroff was still in Britain.



The Courage of Lily Potter

One of the most promising hints of future directions of development that Rowling appeared to give us in OotP was the mystery of the Locked Door in the Dept. of Mysteries.

Well, no such luck. To all appearances, the Locked Door and the mysterious “power” behind it was just a portentous sounding blast of hot air that Rowling tossed in, in order to appear profound.

And perhaps to keep us all busy chasing false trails for the two years between OotP and HBP.

Indeed, it gets worse. Some years later, when questioned on the subject in yet another bloody interview she quipped that the employees of the DoM were in there experimenting with Amotensia. Which we were clearly told in canon doesn’t even produce a genuine emotion, let alone any mysterious “power.” And of which we were warned about when she first introduced the stuff.

The stupidity. It burns.

Consequently, for the purposes of this essay I am going to ignore Rowling’s unconcealed contempt for the intelligence of the people who made her fortune, and try to treat the issues she raised in the course of the series as if they meant something.



At the very end of OotP Professor Dumbledore informs us that in the Department of Mysteries there is a room which is kept perpetually locked. And that room contains a force that is at once more wonderful and terrible than death, than human intelligence, than forces of nature. He contends that it is arguably the most mysterious of the many subjects for study that reside in that Department.



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It takes the reader only the very smallest of leaps to identify this mysterious force as the power of Love™. And at the time I suspected that even Professor Trelawney on a bad day could have predicted that this locked door and the force contained by it would ultimately figure in some manner in the final resolution of the continuing adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord. Indeed, given the fact that by that point in the series it was clear that the wizarding world had shaped up into a rather nasty little dystopia, I would not have been surprised to learn that one of the intrinsic agenda items in Harry’s “Heroic Task” would be to get the damn door open.

Which, assuming that the issue is supposed to be actually relevant to the series, really does raise the question of why the door was locked in the first place. The ww shows every sign of being just as prone to sentimental twaddle as the Muggle one, and Voldemort’s open contempt of all feelings (other than anger) is clearly not shared by the wizard in the street.

But, given the Ministry’s standing alliance with the Dementors, one has to wonder whether it might have originally been locked by treaty. And if so, then it was past time that someone reminded Minister Scrimgeour that the Dementors had broken their side of the agreement.



At any number of points in the series Professor Dumbledore assured Harry that it was his mother’s love for him that saved him. And it seemed blindingly apparent that, post-HBP despite Professor Dumbledore’s removal from the game board, we had not heard the last of that theme.



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With all due respect, even in the face of Rowling's apparent dismissal of the matter, I am still convinced that Lily's love must have had a bit of additional help. Even the most powerful weapon in existence is of little use unless you have some manner in which to aim it.

So once again I find myself butting heads with Rowling over her explanations for what she tries to claim has happened in the series, and her excuses for why people have taken the actions she claims they have taken. Her explanations all too often simply do not add up, either for the characters as she established them, or under the circumstances she claims were present. The puppets' strings show, they have gotten into a tangle and the lighting is bad..

"Because I say so," just isn't good enough. That wasn't a convincing argument when I was six. By this time I just flatly do not believe Rowling. She makes things up. Admittedly, she gets paid to do so, but I do not *have* to accept what is *obviously* false.

She's also changed her stories too often for me to still trust her to have any clear idea of what she is talking about. Let alone trust her intentions.

Given that, *actio Fudge*, the "war" against Voldemort's terrorists had been openly in progress by the mid-1960s, the chances that Lily Potter was the first person to have ever thrown herself into the firing line to save someone else, crying; 'No, no kill me instead!' seems vanishingly unlikely. Even if I am correct in my suspicion that the most bloody phase of Voldemort's campaign for world domination™ was only launched after he learned about the Trelawney Prophecy, it seemed improbable that this scenario had never been enacted.



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However, Rowling tells us that, no, over the course of some 20 years, Lily was the first person to whom Voldemort had actually offered the choice of saving their own life and walking away.

If, that is, even what he actually *did*. Wait for it.

Missed opportunities abound, because it could have made sense.

Welcome to another exploration of; "what if?"



Rowling's statement alluded to above was made in response to the question of whether Lily had known that her sacrifice would save her son. And so far as I recall, Rowling's reply was phrased along the lines of; no, she couldn't know because no one had ever been offered that choice before. Which doesn't exactly answer the question.

What does being offered a choice have to do with it? Throwing yourself in the path of a bullet is throwing yourself in the path of a bullet. You make that choice without ever being *offered* it. A fat lot of good all of Rowling's song-and-dance about the importance of one's choices is if the only choices that count are the ones that are formally *offered*.

It's also completely disingenuous.

It not only sounds an awful lot like hair-splitting, but it doesn't actually answer the question that was asked. No, of course Lily could not have known from report, or from experience that sacrificing her own life would save that of her child. But then why did she do it if she had no reason to think it might *do something*?

And frankly, from where I am standing, Rowling's expla-



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nation diminishes Lily's sacrifice altogether. Rendering it into a combination of a useless gesture on the order of Bellatrix marching off, head-high into Azkaban, and a certain form of cowardice (or despair) manifesting as a determination to die herself before she has to watch the Dark Lord kill her baby.

Even though in the final accounting Lily Potter turns out to have been a hopelessly shallow little bint, and every bit as pleased with herself as her husband was, it's still a bit much to keep insisting that the only thing of significance she managed to accomplish in her life was done completely by accident.

Looked at with any sense of detachment, Rowling's answer sounds rather to me like an attempt to deflect attention from the issue by wrapping it up in a supposedly impenetrable "mystery" so she doesn't have to explain anything. Which now, downstream of DHs, we realize is probably *exactly* what she was doing.

Which does hypothetically add a couple of mildly interesting twists to this puzzle. First it confirms that, unlikely as it may seem, Voldemort was telling a *form* of truth when he assures Harry in PS/SS that his mother "didn't have to die" (although, in the "flashback" in DHs, WE certainly never heard him do anything like actually *offer* Lily her life). Second, it implies that the one who "defied" him three times in the first place probably was James, and James alone. Voldemort was fairly insistent that James Potter did have to die. Lily was irrelevant to his accounting. And, given what we now know about Lily's broad popularity in school, the tired old theory that one of Voldemort's followers had asked that she be spared is, once again, in full play. Even Rowling seems to believe it.

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I suppose the most charitable interpretation is that Rowling just doesn't particularly care about how her characters got themselves into a mess. She is only concerned with getting them out. Or with conspicuously *not* getting them out and pointing to it as a moral.

Frankly, I'd be a lot more inclined to believe that Tom had agreed to spare Lily simply in order to get a more secure hold over Snape.

He really didn't have anything like as solid a hold over Snape as he did the rest of his followers. That was a downside of his having adopted the whole pureblood entitlement party line wholesale, back when he first started his collection of the *crème de la crème* of wizarding society. Snape wasn't a pureblood, and he had never been brought up to expect that he was entitled to anything simply because of who his family was.

Tom could offer him a free pass regarding the Dark Arts, but Snape could have gotten into those without Tom's assistance, and they both knew it. And Tom probably *had* managed to get a sort of a handle on him with the usual twin holds of anger and ambition, but anger doesn't always last, and ambition can be satisfied — and, more to the point, if it isn't fed, it tends to start looking elsewhere. So, Tom might have been very interested in getting a firmer grip. Particularly in the form of a personal obligation. *Particularly* when you add in the fact that Snape was probably the only one of his followers who knew anything of the actual content of the Trelawney Prophecy. If Snape was requesting Lily's life, then Tom may have been quite willing to tell him that he'd spare her. Even if Snape never saw her again her life could be held hostage for Snape's good behavior forever.

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And he *certainly* never promised to spare her and *give* her to Snape..

Just to spare her.

But I'd agree that Rowling is basically correct in her additional statement in that if that ploy had even once resulted in a rebounded curse, there is no way that Voldemort would have overlooked that possibility again. He would have stunned rather than killed her, stepped over her unconscious body, murdered Harry and left her lying there for the Muggle authorities to find, or for any random followers to "take care of." In fact, her biggest risk was that he would do that in any case.

Of course if anyone had thrown themselves into the path of a plain-vanilla AK it wouldn't have mattered. You aren't going to get any kind of rebound from merely killing the wrong person.

Indeed, realizing that she *had* a choice (assuming she realized anything of the sort), she seems to have been desperate to be allowed to actually *make* her choice, and make it *stick*.

In Rowling's hands, she wasn't even allowed to realize *that* much. Which undermines everything Rowling has ever had to say on the subject.



Which is not at all a place that I'd want to be arguing from.

Because I would much rather think that Lily must have had some reason to at least *hope* that once she had given her life for her son, something would intervene to prevent Voldemort from killing Harry as well. Otherwise she was making a hollow bargain, a gesture as futile as Bellatrix Lestrange's grand, but empty, pronouncement at her own sentencing to Azkaban.



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Which, as Snape rubbed Bellatrix's nose in it, simply translated into being taken out of any position in which she could have done anything for the cause at all.

We still know far too little of Lily Potter as an individual to be able to make any sort of truly educated speculations regarding the probable resources that she was drawing upon in her ultimately successful coup against her murderer. But some degree of speculation is still possible concerning the class of magic she may have been familiar with by that point in her life.

If, that is, one squints around the edges of the "Rowling filter." And ignores what Rowling decided at the last moment to show us in DHs. For, what she showed us then was a flat contradiction of just about everything she'd always claimed. Either in OR outside the actual published books which she had already sold us.

Unless, of course, we are supposed to conclude that Tom was hallucinating that alleged memory of his visit to Godric's Hollow on Halloween of 1981. As she wrote it (rather than *said* it) Tom simply blew himself up, and rendered Harry beyond his reach, merely by breaking his promise to Snape.

Well, hey, I can work with that, too.



Lily Potter, *née* Evans, may have been a bright young witch, but she wasn't more than 21 years old at the time of her death and we do not know whether she had any specific personal strengths beyond Ollivander's statement that her first wand was particularly well adapted for Charms, and Slughorn's contention that she was a "natural" at Potions. She was certainly



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not granted enough time to have become a recognized expert on any given subject.

Therefore, whatever the resources she drew upon in her sacrifice were, they must have either been ones that are in general distribution throughout the wizarding world, or she had some specialized source of information.

And I've kicked both possibilities around the block a few times over the past couple of decades.



The only thing that we know for certain about Lily Evans — once she finished school, is that she made a very good marriage for a Muggle-born witch from a commonplace, presumably lower middle-class background. Her young husband was bright, (very!) well-connected, good-natured, adored her, and had inherited enough of a fortune that he did not really need to work for a living.

In short, James Potter's primary "job," like that of Lucius Malfoy, might have consisted of attending to his sources of income, his family's investments, and their financial interests. All of which would have entailed at least some familiarity with wizarding business law and, one assumes, its attendant magically binding contracts.

Or at least that was my original line of reasoning. Back around the start of the 3-Year summer, I originally thought that Lily had managed to trick Voldemort into some form of "contract." If he agreed to kill her, he may not touch her kid.

Well, I am afraid even I no longer support that line of reasoning. Tempting as it was at the time.



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Not that I accept Rowling's post-release statement that all James, Sirius, and Lily ever did with themselves was to sign up as full-time fighters with the Order of the Phoenix and live off of James's inheritance while they did it, either. It doesn't really hold water, and besides, as soon as she gets another "cool idea" she'll probably just contradict it anyway.

I will readily admit to a preference for believing that Lily Potter was a witch of stronger character than Rowling paints her; and that she was just as capable of meeting death bravely as her husband.

That, according to Harry's Dementor-assisted recollection of the event, she instead went out on a wave of classic "helpless female" tears and shrieking, seems just altogether too pat. It reduces her to a cartoon, or at best, storybook damsel in distress with no white knight on offer (question: Why doesn't Harry's dementor-assisted memory of the night he lost his parents ever include the noise of the house blowing up? Wouldn't you expect a toddler to find *that* frightening, too?). And yet, if the scene we witnessed in the Pensieve junket in OotP is to be trusted, it is Lily that Harry most resembles in character, rather than James. I thought for some time that this could well be significant.

But in view of the intermediate developments of my attempts to extrapolate a schematic of how Horcruxes are created which takes into account as many of the anomalies which we are forced to juggle in this series as possible, and which is explored in the essay of 'C.S.I.: Godric's Hollow' such complexity over magical contracts is no longer required.

If those extrapolations are anything like correct, Lily appears to have saved her son by literally throwing herself into the path



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of a curse which required that it be “grounded” by a specific relationship existing between the Murderer and the Victim, thereby destabilizing it, to unknown, but spectacular, results.

It plays. Even if Rowling never thought of it. She pretty obviously hasn’t any better explanation to offer in its stead. (I think she believes that explaining oneself is for wusses.)

But the overriding question is whether Lily *knew* it would do that. Obviously she could not have known that her sacrifice would *continue* to protect her son for another decade, and beyond, but it seems to me that if she was aware that the curse being cast required grounding, she might have guessed that getting in the way might do **something** more to derail it than simply forcing Voldemort to make a second attempt.



I cannot say whether I was even partially correct in my suspicion that a paradox was created by Tom’s determination to use Harry’s blood in the creation of his simulacrum. It is uncertain whether Dumbledore’s additional 3rd-party protections, which allegedly had rendered Harry safe from Voldemort while in the company of his mother’s “blood” kin may have contributed to the underlying paradox so long as it ran, or whether the simulacrum’s blood relationship to Harry had merely replaced Lily’s original protective barrier with a different one. One in which both of them were protected, but inside said barrier. So long as Dumbledore’s protection applied, it appeared that Harry could not be killed by Voldemort before he attained his majority, because for as long as he had not yet attained his majority, he was safe from Voldemort while in the company of a member of his mother’s



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“blood” kin. Which Voldemort’s new simulacrum now was.

According to Rowling, the blood protection did not work as I had extrapolated, but it some form of blood protection certainly appeared to be still in operation. Instead, it appears to have tied the two of them together to the point that either both OR neither of them could properly die until all of Tom’s Horcruxes had been accounted for.

Like most fans, I preferred to believe Lily was a valiant and an intelligent young woman. One who would have realized that for all of James’s urging that she attempt to get Harry and take him to safety, the likelihood of her managing to do that was vanishingly small and Harry’s chances of survival depended upon her not letting that curse reach him, for all that she would not live to tell the tale.

But, then, her living was not the point. Harry’s was.

And she lucked out; she may have been working from a desperate, but faulty premise. We know that the Avada Kedavra curse does not have any known magical block or counter-spell. Making a sacrifice of her own life would not have been able to block an AK. The AK is *known* to be unblockable. Getting in the way of it would certainly not have blocked any attempt of a subsequent AK.

But if Voldemort was trying to create his final Horcrux from the death of Harry Potter as Albus contended (and as Rowling completely failed to show us), then if magic works in anything like a rational manner, I believed that he would not have tried to use a mere AK to kill Harry. An AK in itself does not create a Horcrux. Voldemort might well have used a specific documented Horcrux-creation curse instead. And that curse is



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evidently *not* unblockable.

So Lily pulled it off



(And this far downstream of the end of the series, even I no longer think I can support the premise that you *cannot* produce a Horcrux by killing someone with an AK. Just that you have to manage a fairly advanced additional step *before* you do that, or it isn't going to work. So that pretty well discounts that line of reasoning, too. But I think I'll continue to follow my original reasoning a bit further, regardless.)



If any of the above holds together internally (and I am well aware that Rowling did not use this reasoning. But then Rowling's explanation does *not* hold together internally), the factor which remains the most unclear is to what degree Lily and James might have worked in concert on it.

If they even did.

It is certainly not difficult to imagine a young couple working something out as a final contingency plan should the Fidelius Charm fail them. But that would require that they knew about the Prophecy, and that they might entertain the possibility that the Fidelius Charm *could* fail.

Nothing that we've seen or heard about James Potter suggests that he was capable of entertaining the possibility of any sort of failure. Such a last-ditch effort to preserve the life of their son might even require that they (or one of them) knew about Tom's Horcruxes. It would also require that the pair of

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them not be totally feckless, which, *act*o Rowling, they were.

On the other hand, we need to remember that the subject of Horcruxes had been *banned* at Hogwarts for decades, and I do not believe that Albus would have explained that that is what Voldemort was likely to be attempting to do by murdering Harry. They certainly did not learn about Horcruxes, or any Horcrux-creation procedure from Albus.

The Black family's private library almost certainly *does* contain the relevant information, however, because Regulus certainly managed to figure it out before he was even out of school, but Sirius had no access to that resource after the age of about 16. James is attributed as having been raised to abhor the Dark Arts, so it is improbable that his resources would have included the information. We have no information on Lupin's or Pettigrew's family backgrounds, and Lily was Muggle-born.

For that matter, we do not know how much faith Lily had in Sirius Black, for all that James was perfectly willing to trust him with his life. If Lily had any qualms, she might have decided to draft out her own "Plan B."

And, just possibly, she had help. Outside help.

Well, okay. We are now completely off the map.

"Abandon Canon All Ye Who Enter Here!"



There are any number of things we do *not* know about Lily. There are a lot of subject about which we have no clue as to how much she knew.

For example: did she know *why* Voldemort wanted to kill her child?

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Did she know why she and James had been invited to join the Order of the Phoenix in the first place? (We're ignoring Rowling's off-canon statements, remember.)

Albus tells Harry that he and Harry are the only two people in the world who (are supposed to) know the full contents of the Trelawney Prophecy. He does not claim, on the page, that they are the only two people who have *ever* known it.

Nor, for that matter, would Lily even *need* to know the full contents of the Prophecy in order to know that it was essential to preserve Harry's life?

And given the looks exchanged between Remus and Sirius when Harry was pumping them for information about the "weapon" Voldemort was trying to get access to in OotP, it seems likely that by that time Albus may have shared the portion of the Prophecy that he had seen leaked to Voldemort with the Order. Particularly if I am correct in my preferred suspicion that he only formed the Order after he was the recipient of the Prophecy.

Or, quite possibly, Albus had only leaked the fact that there even was a Prophecy when he was setting up his Year 5 scam to protect a Prophecy *record*.



At this point I am going to invite you all along on a side trip to admire the Martian Canals. There never was any textual support for the following theories, and Rowling has since hosed some of the main components. But I still think most of them play reasonably well. Certainly as well, or better, than the mawkish and irrational excuses *she* gives us.



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They also fit snugly into some of the oddly-shaped gaps in what we do know, but I agree that they are not the only things that fit into those gaps.

The main thing is; ever since I disentangled the underlying *concept* (which is not unsound) from the generally received Snape-loved-Lily *theory* (which I could never seriously entertain. I just can't, not the way it is generally presented.) I've had the conviction in the back of my mind that to establish that Snape and Lily were involved in some sort of a magical partnership would pay dividends in an area that is a LOT more important to the central issue of the story than just who had originally owned that bloody Potions book.

As I say, I realize I may be off sailing on the Martian canals again. But I couldn't really shake the idea. And, in the end, I wasn't wrong, in the essentials. What lay between Snape and Lily was a great deal more significant than a stupid teenaged crush. And for some years it *did* function as a partnership between them. At least until Lily bought the package that Snape had "loser cooties" and that if she continued to hang out with him, she would end up catching them.

Then she started brushing Snape off until he finally gave her an excuse to drop him completely. We are certainly invited to believe that she never gave him the time of day after she blew him off outside the door to the Gryffindor common room when he tried to apologize.

We cannot necessarily say the same for him.

He begged Tom for her life, after all. Then he crossed the line and begged Albus as well.

Mightn't he have tried to warn *her*?



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For example: where would Lily get the idea that she might save Harry by giving up her own life in exchange?

That isn't an obvious leap of logic. And she couldn't have known that it would work, but she gave Voldemort her life, and it *did* work. She completely derailed the curse he had thrown — so completely that it blew up in his own face and would have killed him if he hadn't made himself a handful of Horcruxes already.

She didn't get that out of a book. It presumably hadn't ever been done before — not so far as anyone seems to know — it's not an obvious variant on an Unbreakable Vow. It doesn't seem to have been a standard *spell* at all. It was a chaotic exchange of her own life, upon which Voldemort had laid no claim, for her son's, magically affecting all three parties.

Well, hey, we all know what branch of magic is fueled by the powers of chaos, don't we?

That's the Dark Arts, loud and clear.

And once the possibility finally introduces itself, the more it seemed that Rowling might have some kind of payoff in store for us regarding the issue of Light vs. Dark Magic. (ETA: no such luck.)

But the Dark Arts are not openly taught at Hogwarts. And James Potter and his crowd was loud in claiming to abhor them.

So where did Lily learn about it?

Somewhere she seems to have picked up enough of the underlying principles of the Dark Arts (or possibly just the underlying theory of Horcrux-creation) to have been able to dare to take that risk. Otherwise it all dwindles into a wimped out "No, no, I can't watch you kill my baby, You'll have to kill me first. Boo-hoo!"

She should have had *some* reason to believe that she might

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be able to save Harry by throwing her own life at Voldemort's feet in exchange.



Well, having tentatively established a working magical — possibly even a professional — partnership with what seems to have been a very talented young Dark wizard might go some way towards explaining it, mightn't it? Particularly if — back when they were still speaking to each other and being best friends, banded against James and his pack of bullies — Severus had enough of a clue to not identify the magical theory he was discussing with her as *being* the Dark Arts. Just referring to it as a very *old* magical theory.

You don't need to be a wealthy, prominent pureblood of ancient lineage to have access to esoteric information. All you need is access to the right books. There isn't any shortage of books at that house in Spinner's End. Old books. Books that probably predate the ban on the subject of Horcruxes at Hogwarts. We don't know how many of those books were inherited. They may not have been on display in the sitting room while Tobias was in residence, but at least some of them were probably in the house.

And, at the Snape end of the equation: if he was desperate enough to plead for her life from both Tom *and* Albus — wouldn't he have tried to explain to her what she was up against? Even if only in an anonymous letter?

Albus certainly encouraged Harry to entrust Ron and Hermione with highly sensitive information on the matter. And Snape may well have shared sensitive information with Lily with-

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out asking Albus's permission. Particularly since it concerned *her*.

Snape may or may not have ever known the whole Prophecy, but he knows what he reported to Voldemort. He may have reasoned out what Voldemort's boasts of immortality added up to. He may have told Lily what Voldemort might be going to try to accomplish by killing Harry. He is certainly sharp enough to have figured it out if he had ever come across any hint of the subject.

And by the time she went under the Fidelius, Lily may have known it also.



And now: we are leaving the Martian Canals, everybody hang on and brace yourself for a paradigm shift.

And a flurry of theories that might have been rather interesting to see play out.

Waaaay back around 1999 or 2000 Rowling dropped the bomb in an interview that we would find that what Harry's parents did for a living was "important." (ETA: Well that certainly never played out, did it? As if.)

Not one further hint did we ever get in the whole series on that issue. Nor in any of Rowling's pre-DHs interviews, either, apart from a repeat of the information that James had enough money that he didn't really need a well-paying job. By the summer HBP came out I'd finally relegated the whole issue to the "abandoned intentions" bin along with the Weasley cousin and the Granger sister.

Well, post-HBP I had to drag it back out and dust it off, and take another look at it. I thought then that we finally may have been handed a hint, and we didn't recognize it for what it was

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until we'd had it a while.

Voldemort allegedly offered Lily Potter a choice to save herself, right (when? Not in *my* hearing)? The only person in the nearly 25 years of his first rise that he ever actually offered a choice to save herself.

Why?

So he could toss her to one of his followers as a reward? Oh really? He'd do that? He's just a twinkly, red-eyed champion of twoo wuv, is he?

Fish fuzz.

Well, maybe in a fanfic near you.

Doesn't it sound a lot more plausible that maybe he offered her that choice because she was potentially valuable enough in herself that even he hesitated to just whack her?

Horace Slughorn spent a whole book rhapsodizing about the Potions miracle that was young Lily Evans. And he's such an old blowhard that it blew right past us.

What if he was *right*?

What if — brilliant as the "Half-Blood Prince" clearly seems to have been — he still came in at 2nd place. That Slughorn overlooked Snape because Lily *really* was even better?

20 years down the track he compares Harry's work to his mother's, rather than Snape's — whose results Harry's can't help but be more consistent with, since he is following Snape's instructions — possibly because the distinctions have blurred in Slughorn's mind with time. Besides, Harry's results shine like a star amid a classroom of (Snape-trained) students who have just spent five years being programed to produce perfect textbook examples, rather than to attempt to innovate.

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But, until DHs swept it all away, I really did think that Rowling may have just given us a hint that Lily herself mattered for more and far better reason than merely that a number of teen-aged boys had fancied her.

Oh, sure, we have always been willing to accept that she was smart. You can't hang around with Hermione Granger for six years and still be unwilling to admit that girls can be smart. But we seem to have been all too willing to accept the assumption that girls are primarily only important because they attract boys. We seem to have encountered some difficulty wrapping our heads around the concept that some girls may just possibly be inherently more important for reasons that have nothing to do with their function as a boy magnet. Maybe with Lily Potter's death the whole wizarding world was deprived of the greatest Potions genius of her generation.

So why haven't we ever heard anything in canon (other than Slughorn) to suggest that?

Well, was Harry *listening*? He didn't even listen to Slughorn. Besides, in all fairness, she was only 21 when she died. However bright the promise, that isn't really much time to have broken any records yet. But you will notice that even one day after they were killed, everybody in the WW seems to have been in no doubt as to just who the Potters were.

And, maybe, just maybe, that had absolutely squat to do with James.

Maybe it was Lily who was the one that was universally beloved. Maybe most people (other than Sirius and Pettigrew) regarded James as a bit of a jerk that they were willing to welcome for her sake.

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And, that's also an idea; IF Lily Evans Potter was acknowledged to be the most brilliant Potions genius of her generation, (grumpily vouched for by Severus Snape, who was almost certainly the best up-and-coming Potions geek inside the DE organization) to the point that Voldemort would actually be willing to spare her because she was potentially valuable in herself; rather than over some half-arsed theory that she was just to be a bad conduct prize for one of his followers; finally her son shows up in Snape's classroom a decade later, and to Severus's disgust, the boy knows NOTHING. Nothing At All.

All of that potential legacy, lost. And the brat doesn't seem to even *care*. All he wants to do is play Quidditch like his useless tosser of a father. Everything to that brat is about his *father*. He doesn't even value the mother who *saved* him.

It might not be correct; but it could be another brick in the wall for Snape's contempt of Harry. And it doesn't even require that Snape have been in love with the girl in order to deplore the utter, utter *waste*.



Which raises another question: just what exactly are we supposed to make of Tom's remark that Lily "needn't" have died?

This is the former Tom Riddle speaking.

And, no, I do NOT believe he was intending to "give" her to a follower who had begged him for her life. If Rowling had the guts to set up consistent characterizations and stick to them, instead of jerking them around to fit the plot *du jour*, she wouldn't say so either. The Tom Riddle who we saw up to the end of OotP, and watched develop over the course of HBP

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would have treated any such soppieness with all the contempt it deserves. From any rational standpoint that script is not even in the running.

He'd not have expected to recruit her, either. Regardless of whatever silly, deliberately misleading hints Rowling might have turned loose in an interview. Even he isn't deranged enough to think that there would be a chance of that after murdering her husband and son.

And whatever his reason to spare her was, it would have been something that benefited *him*, not anybody else.

Well I can come up with a couple of possibilities. One of them is really rather sweet. The second is not nice At All.



For the nicer one, a lot depends upon just what Lily did do for a living. And, for that matter, possibly what Snape did for a living before Voldemort ordered him into Hogwarts. What if they really were professional partners. Or, rather, let's scale that back to co-workers. Ignore the snotty DHs brush-off scene outside the Gryffindor common room, we're playing around with theories which might actually hang together, here. And how many youngsters just starting out get to pick and choose just who they have to share professional workspace with? Given their talents and Slughorn's contacts it isn't hard at all to imagine that they may have both been employed at St Mungo's or some major commercial potions supplier. Or in the Ministry's research labs.

So just what was Tom's situation at that point?

Well, timing, timing, timing. Voldemort has just ordered his best potions specialist off to Hogwarts.

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And rather than being stuck in the cursed DADA position which would send him right back out by the end of the school year, he was now established in the Potions position. Which has no built-in sell-by date.

Having a permanent agent inside the school is all kinds of useful for Tom's long-term takeover plans, but it means he can't utilize him as his primary potions supplier. Doing without his potions specialist for a year might have been regarded as a necessary sacrifice, but as things now stand, he isn't going to be getting him back at the end of that year, and he needs to make other arrangements. Sooner rather than later.

I don't think that Voldemort has a large ongoing need of illegal potions, but he probably has an sizable ongoing need of healing ones for his followers' use. Also for some more dodgy things that are highly regulated by the Ministry like Veritiserum or Polyjuice. Probably also some other brews that we don't necessarily know about, too. And some of these are tricky to make and he probably doesn't trust the Knockturn alley suppliers. Nor does he want any of the commercial suppliers to notice ongoing bulk orders that aren't obviously going to the Ministry or St Mungo's. Those would be far too easy to trace.

Ergo: he needs a private supplier. One with access to a commercial-grade set-up. One whose work is of a quality he can trust.

Well, Snape being inside Hogwarts means that Slughorn is out where people could get at him, and he's a pushover. But Slughorn may not have a set-up which is up to Voldemort's ongoing demands. He's retired, he probably just dabbles.

Well, even Snape admitted that Lily was as good at potions as he was. And while there was no chance of enlisting her, it might

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be possible to trick or force her into making herself useful.

By using Slughorn.

We don't know whether Imperius takes the edge off of one's magical performance. Rowling has made so much of a botch with explaining Imperius that we can't tell.

But just lean on Sluggy a bit, and give him a reason to cooperate, and he would.

One of his favorite recent students has just had her life spared. Co-operate and she'll come to no further harm. In fact Sluggy might have eventually been encouraged to take her on to "keep her safe". And incidentally, to assist him in producing what was demanded of him.

Would a tragically widowed Lily have suspected such an offer from her old professor? Particularly when the kindness was quite genuine? How long before she might begin to wonder about the orders they were filling. How long before she realized that they were trapped? Because Slughorn's life would be as much held hostage for her good behavior as hers was for his.

And as for Snape; I really can't see him playing a useless "Oh Master spare my twoo wuv, give her to me!" bit. Not even at the age of 20. But I could easily see him coming up with a "cunning plan" such as the above to suggest to Tom which might keep a couple of (other) Potions specialists busy and out of the direct line of fire.



Which brings us to the possibility that isn't nice at all.

Sometimes you just have to keep asking yourself: "What would Tom Riddle do?"

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And then perhaps take it a bit farther and ask; "What has Tom Riddle *done*?"

Tom never actually comes out and says that he was willing to *spare* Lily. He just says that she "needn't have died."

Well, it — long belatedly — occurs to me that neither did Morfin Gaunt.

Is *that* what his game was? That Lily was supposed to take the fall for murdering her husband and son? With HIS memory of having done it to take off to Azkaban with her?

And for her, incidentally, to retroactively be identified as the spy in the Order, by default, leaving a shocked and grieving Peter in place to carry on the good work?

I'll have to admit that the possibility of Tom fitting Lily up for life in Azkaban is just way too hard to overlook now that it has finally occurred to me. With a forged memory grafted on, she wouldn't have even had Sirius's cold comfort that she was innocent.

Never mind that he probably wouldn't have had a snowball's chance in Hell of pulling it off. He may not have remembered that Albus was onto his little exercises in memory management. Besides he'd *also* have needed to eliminate Sirius Black in some manner rather less, um, *explosive* than Peter's.

And he still had to eliminate the Longbottom child as well, to be *really* safe from the "Child of Prophecy".

And of course, eliminating any number of children wouldn't have rid him of *Albus*.

And for that matter it isn't by any means a done deal, since it had been a long time since he felt much need to provide a fall guy to conceal his own murders. I suspect a lot depends upon just how important Pettigrew's ongoing information on

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the Order's movements was considered to be.

Peter pulled off framing Sirius Black because he didn't try to get excessively clever about it, and Sirius had already laid most of the groundwork for him. Tom doesn't have Peter's common sense and knack for keeping things in scale. We really ought to be a lot more impressed by Peter than we are. He is really far too competent to keep overlooking the way we do. Too well-informed, also.

But where the whole ww seems to have turned on a dime in their reading of Sirius Black's character and motives on the Ministry's say-so, and Albus didn't make any attempt to contradict it, there isn't any indication that they, or Albus, would have done the same to Lily, had Peter "discovered" her alive after presumably killing her husband and son.

And Sirius of course.

Maybe we ought to pay a little more attention when people tell us things. Sirius had made arrangements to check on Peter that evening, and upon finding him gone, rather than telling anyone about his misgivings, he ran straight off to Godric's Hollow to investigate.

And right into an ambush, had things not already gone belly-up. I'm sure Lily would have remembered killing *him*, too.



I've tripped over another missed opportunity here, as well. This one is even DHs-compliant.

We could have had a very nice, tidy bit of closing the circle if Rowling's apparent blind spot about the worth of Severus Snape hadn't been in the way.



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In its place we got an excessive load of gibberish about the true ownership of the Deathstick. Which in a severe lapse of judgment ended up being applied to *all* wands, rather than the singular, presumably *unique* one, in order to make it play at all, which rendered the whole premise into something beyond the capacity of even balogneum to contain (more on that subject in the essay entitled 'The Power He "Knows Not"').

Of course this view also requires absolutely rejecting what the Harry-centric narrator and Harry himself have to say about what is going on. But since when is Harry so all-knowing, and unfailingly right about everything?

Oh, that's right. Not until DHs. And I didn't believe it there either. I certainly don't believe much of anything else in that book.

We've already had it established that the only reason that Lily was able to give Harry that "super-special" blood protection was because she had been given a legitimate choice to save herself.

Rowling isn't making any open statements admitting as much but it looks perilously close to being established in canon that the only reason she was given that choice is because Severus had abased himself to Tom and begged for her life (and you know it would have taken that. No one petitions Tom Riddle from a position of superiority, or even anything approaching equality).

Ergo: in the end, Harry owes his mother's blood protection (as well as his life) to Snape. Yes, again. Indeed, from the very beginning.

And had the matter been handed only slightly differently, that wouldn't have been the last of it. And it wouldn't end with Harry, either.

Let's give a bit of consideration to the issue of blood protection. To recap:



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Harry claims that *his* marching off to let Tom kill him gave protection to *everybody* in the school, so that none of Tom's curses managed to stick.

Well, *excuuuuuse* me, but if Snape IS dead, we might just have another Harry and the Prince's Potions book moment here. Somebody is pulling a Lockhart and claiming credit for someone *eles's* work. Again.

Whose death is more likely to protect all the people loyal to Hogwarts; a famous dropout's, or the Headmaster who has *personally* vowed to his predecessor to protect them all?

After all, which one of the two is even *dead*?

On the face of it Snape died to preserve his cover. He was under tacit orders from Tom to stand there and permit himself to be murdered without defending himself. He was also under continuing orders from Albus not to give away his own true position.

This is nowhere near as clear cut as Lily's alleged "choice," because there is no certainty that Snape actually had the information which would have enabled him to talk his way out of the situation and save himself. (The reader is aware of it, but we do not know that he is.) And I suspect that had he known that to talk his way out would condemn Draco, I think he would still not have done it, even if he *had* already been released from his Unbreakable Vow.

Instead, Severus Snape chose to permit his own murder, just as surely as Albus did. Just as surely as Harry did. Just as surely as Lily did. And he fully *expected* to die.

Arthur Weasley was bitten by that same snake, with multiple bites, had broken ribs, and lay on the floor of the Ministry for at least a half hour before he was even *found*, and he sur-



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vived. Snape may have thought he had at least a little time. Yes, he knew that he was dying when Tom and Nagini swept out of the Shack but he was not dead yet, and he was trying to stop the flow of blood from the wound. He had a message still to pass on, and he may have been trying to survive long enough and muster the strength to send it.

Only; Harry was suddenly *right there*, and Snape shifted all of his efforts not to hang onto his life, but to make sure that Harry would get Albus's last message, and possibly enough background that he understood what had led up to it.

I think we really ought to consider that, if Snape is dead, it was the effort of wandlessly pouring out those memories that actually killed him. He threw away of any chance or even the faintest *hope* of survival. To pour out his blood and his memories for Harry's sake he was certainly choosing to die for Harry and for his cause. He didn't just give Harry a bottle of memories, he gave him his life's blood. Literally.

Tom had already bypassed Lily's original blood protection at least partially (it is doubtful that he had bypassed it entirely. Harry was still pretty bullet-proof, even after GoF), but by *Snape's* death, giving Harry the information he needed, along with his own life's blood — rather than attempting to save his *own* life — he may have added a new level to, or managed to recharge, Lily's original protection, which Lily owed to Snape in the first place.

That could hypothetically have contributed majorly to Harry's survival at "Kings Cross."

That Snape was effectively dying for the sake of Lily's blood very well might have recharged her initial protection, even if with somewhat diminished strength, since it now came at one



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remove, and Snape was no blood kin of Lily's (if that even matters. Why would dying for a fellow soldier who shares your mission count for less than dying for your child? Dead is dead. Sacrifice is sacrifice).

Given that Harry by that point was legally an adult and no longer even a student of the school; *his* death, regardless of how willing, should have had no effect upon Hogwarts. But Snape's *as well as* Harry's? That's worth considering.



And considering how Snape's sacrifice regards Harry: what would be the result if Snape's death *had* been spun into a renewed blood protection upon Harry which Tom didn't know about and so hadn't yet figured a way around?

That whole line of reasoning hangs together and flows much more smoothly than the Elder wand claptrap that Harry came up with, doesn't it?

Because what took place in Aragog's clearing really did echo what took place in Godric's Hollow to quite a startling degree.

Tom was knocked out by the backwash of his own curse, *again*, even if it appeared that he had managed to kill Harry. That was not the soul fragment whimpering under a bench in that station. That was Tom *himself*. The soul fragment had already been sent beyond the Veil. And we already know that merely destroying his Horcruxes has no noticeable effect upon him. He isn't even aware of it happening. And I would guarantee that he had never before cursed anyone other than Harry and been knocked out from it.

Indeed it had only happened that once, at Godric's Hollow.

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And that time the effect was several magnitudes worse. Enough so that he may not have recognized that even the slightest similarity could *mean* something.

Looks enough like a sacrificial blood protection to me.

And we don't even need to take the Elder wand into consideration in the clearing. Without the hawthorn wand to intercede, the Elder wand, going through the motions, sending off a curse from a user who was not its Master, and wouldn't know Harry from Adam. The wand simply wasn't trying, and when it reached the subject it was offered a choice of targets and took the one that was unprotected.

It found two victims instead of one. The AK was miraculously shielded from one party. It chose the other. And knocked Tom — who was indistinguishable from the unprotected fragment — out with the backwash. This was a flat-out, blood-protection rebound effect, *just like* the one in Godric's Hollow, even if, this time, the effect was far less devastating.

Only, this time, it was the Elder wand that was in play, and the Elder wand was being deployed by the victim.

That's right. By the time Tom faced Harry in the Great Hall, that wand had *already* killed him once.

That can not possibly *not* matter.

One could make quite an argument that the Elder wand dislikes unfinished business. And it is old enough to have developed a degree of agency of its own.

To put it bluntly, that's the real danger of the Elder wand. It is centuries old. Even if it ever was, it is certainly no longer just a mostly-inert tool for channeling magic. It has collected a degree of awareness independent of the hands that have

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attempt to use it. And I think that all human lives are as mayflies to it. It was never going to acknowledge one of *them* as Master. It may, at best accept one of them as a partner. While they last. I suspect that both Albus and Gellert managed to figure that much out. Tom never even tried.

The Hawthorn wand was irrelevant. Tom was attempting to use a wand that had already mastered *him*. It was just itching for an excuse to finish the job.

With his old yew wand Tom's AK in the Great Hall would have plowed right through the Expeliarmus that Harry cast to get to him even if they had cast at exactly the same moment. We'd not even have been tossed another Priori Incantatum episode, for the hawthorn wand wasn't the yew wand's brother. We don't know for certain whether they even did cast at the same time. The Elder wand co-opted an opposing spell as a possible surface to reflect off of. It may have also picked up some sense of the hawthorn stick that had blasted it out of an earlier holder's hand (although I very much doubt it. I think the spell log had been completely overwritten over the intervening year). Between the two-pronged defense of the Elder wand's *possible* recognition of the hawthorn wand that had technically defeated it once, and Lily — and Snape's — renewed blood protection on Harry, topped with its own mission to finish killing the demonstrated victim, produced another complete rebound of Tom's curse which killed him for the third and final time. Harry wasn't even touched.

And not a single piece of the action related to these events really changes anything that Rowling has already written down and given us.

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Just the extrapolation of what was going on underneath it.

Of course a complete rewrite of KC!Albus's pronouncements (which were already more than just a bit questionable, and now read as complete balderdash) would probably be in order too. Maybe someone ought to hold a contest to rewrite that whole chapter.



The Art of the Possible

*"One always picks the easy fight,
One praises fools, one smothers light.
One shifts from left to right.
Politics: the art of the Possible"*

(With apologies to Andrew Lloyd Weber & Tim Rice)



The takeover of the Ministry in DHs was, for me, the point that the 7th book irrevocably jumped the shark. That business came *nowhere* near to "the possible".

Not that I didn't already have plenty of problems with the book and the sloppy handling of information before that. There was no shortage of irritating glitches and gaffes for me to trip over in the first 7 chapters. But the fall of the Ministry was the point that I was irretrievably thrown out of the story and never really managed to get all the way back in.

I flatly do not believe that book.

And I *certainly* don't believe the fall of the Ministry and the virtual rolling over of the whole British ww within a matter of weeks without a protest.

I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it.

As the problem was defined by another member of a list-group to which I belonged at the time:

"She pretended to be using her story to tell us about our world; instead she used our world to tell us about her story. ... her world does not reflect the moral spectrum of our world, but distorts it. What she tells us about the nature of good and evil is a lie. On the other hand, she uses RL motifs, eg Nazi/blond/pure-blood/propaganda/camps, as shorthand proofs of evil to



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make her world seem more applicable and real than it is."

And I wholeheartedly concur.

It took the Nazis close to 20 years to get established to the point that our Tom seems to have managed in about eight weeks. And without ever showing his face, either. Hitler had been holding public rallies for years.

And I don't believe it.

If taking over the Ministry only required putting the Minister, or the head of the DMLE under Imperius, why didn't he do that the first time?

Hell, he had the man's own son on tap to do it, in the privacy of their own home, too.

Even BabyMort managed to put Barty Crouch under Imperius. It didn't last more than a few months, but that's just because no one kept an eye on him to make sure he wasn't throwing it off.



Frankly, I'm inclined to suspect that Tom didn't take over the Ministry the first time round because he had no intention of taking over the Ministry at all. He was enjoying himself perfectly well with things as they were, thank you very much.

He did it the second time to give his followers something to do, and keep them occupied while he took care of the threat of the Potter boy and went in search of true immortality. The troops can run the damn government to suit themselves, and he'll just fly the flag and put a word in here or there as he pleases just so they remember that ultimately he is still in charge.

In CoS, PoA, and even GoF the political backdrop was



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roughly in scale with the story. The exaggerations of OotP were over the top, but they still played. Mainly because they were pretty firmly kept in the background. They were even further in the background in HBP.

But the requirements of the story that Rowling had decided to tell in DHs demanded that they elbow their way into the foreground, at least during part of the book. And when they did, they were flatly unbelievable.

And I wasn't the only one to think so, either.



Early in September 2007 I happened to post a comment to the effect of this on the now departed 'Tea at Spinner's End' board where I hung out.

One of the other members took up the gauntlet and tossed out a suggestion which set off a discussion which ran over the course of about four days and which, although it probably doesn't cover every possible permutation, seems to have explored the subject pretty nicely.

I had intended to work up something out of that discussion from my own posts.

However, it soon became apparent that a composition in six-part harmony tends to lose a lot when reduced to a single voice.

Consequently: you win a prize! Herein follows a transcript of the whole discussion re-posted with the permission of the participants.

I will admit that my own posts have been reworked and expanded for clarity (and upon occasion, grammar). Those of the rest of the participants have been no more than reformat-



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ted. Although some exterania which had nothing to do with the main discussion may have been deleted.

As is typically the case so early after the release of a book, we were more committed to doing a patch job, than simply scrapping something that was presented as legitimate canon.

The full cast is, in order of appearance:

Myself, R.V. Crouch, Ceridwen, PosterFour, shely_nyc, & anonymous



Me:

The more I think of what actually happened in DHs, the more I come to the conclusion that the real problem is what everyone — particularly the narrator — has to say about it.

The timing is totally off on some things. I can't believe that the Ministry fell and the whole society rolled over as quickly as Rowling claims it did. I cannot believe in some of the last minute excuses she pulled out of her hat, (*cough* Ron speaking Parseltongue *cough*) but for the most part I haven't that big a quibble with the actual actions. I just flatly cannot believe the explanations she gives for things.

R.V. Crouch:

<The timing is totally off on some things. I can't believe that the Ministry fell and the whole society rolled over as quickly as Rowling claims it did.>

Very true. In fact I had exactly the same feeling of disbelief during the Ministry oppression in OotP. It was a very shoddy recreation of 1984. The WW behaves in the same kind of brain-



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washed mindless fashion as Orwell's Oceania (Both the Ministry and Voldemort can change Harry from Savior to Nemesis in one night. That reminds me so strongly of that speech the leader gives the crowd where he changes the enemy from Eurasia to Eastasia in a single breath). But the huge difference is that there's absolutely no justification for the WW to behave like this.

JKR would have been much better off cutting out the entire self serving Ministry plot of OotP and giving Lord Voldemort his coup in Book 5 itself. He could have manipulated and pulled strings for two years and then I may have believed the deception and public subservience.

I'm reminded of the Prophecy. JKR could have given Voldemort his coup and the Prophecy in Book 5. Did Voldemort's ignorance of the whole Prophecy during the Second War change anything? What difference would it have made if he had known that 'neither can live while the other survives' or that 'he will have a power the Dark Lord knows not'? Voldemort's arrogance would have made him believe that the 'power' in question would be irrelevant (and he would have been right BTW. Voldemort was defeated by the 'Master of the Elder Wand'.)

A rewrite from Book 5 onwards would be great. Book 5 should be the Ministry coup. Book 6 is already perfect as the Hogwarts coup ('apparent' coup since Voldemort only thinks Snape is his) Book 7 would then have looked a little more realistic when the WW rolled over.

Me:

And forget Pius Thickenesse. It was Scrimgeour who was put under Imperius during the first part of OotP while the Ministry

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was trying to deny the return and not watching their own backs.

The coup (Phase I) should have taken place at the same time the Dementors left Azkaban in January, with Voldemort making his ultimatum then, displacing Fudge [with Scrimgeour (who immediately locked horns with Albus)], and there would have been something other than merely going around the bend to explain Umbridge's escalating tyranny. And the Raid on the DoM would have had something going on beyond a simple case of breaking and entering. There would have also have been an external reason for the Order to have withdrawn their guards on the place after Arthur's snakebite.

By the end of the year, the Phase II ought to have gone in with Scrimgeour getting the Dementors off the streets and back into Ministry "control," and the fact that the DEs swept up in the raid had escaped before the Dementors returned to the prison could have been tucked into the QUIBBLER, or even the PROPHET. (And some of the most useful of them could have been given a blanket pardon for some bogus service or other).

I think we could have done perfectly well without the Other Minister chapter. Even if Rowling did keep desperately trying to find a book to put it in.

Ceridwen:

<And forget Pius Thickenesse. It was Scrimgeour who was put under Imperius during the first part of OotP while the Ministry was trying to deny the return and not watching their own backs.>

This could have been shown, or implied, at the beginning of HBP, revealed in the QUIBBLER, and therefore placing Luna in danger

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months before she was in the series. This is the sort of thing Hermione would think of and talk about after the article, even if no one believes her based on Luna's disregard for any supposed danger. Hermione could take the Cassandra role, with the usual resulting misleading plotline up to Luna's capture. Her Quidditch commentary was cute, but I think her capture would have moved the plot better.

<The coup (Phase I) should have taken place at the same time the Dementors left Azkaban in January, displacing Fudge, and there would have been something other than merely going around the bend to explain Umbridge's escalating tyranny.>

It would have been a good moment, too, to have Scrimgeour in the Headmaster's office instead of Fudge when the DA is ratted out. It would have been a shock to Harry and the reader that the Minister could be replaced so quickly (he seems to have been replaced quickly between OotP and HBP anyway, so no difference there).

<And the Raid on the DoM would have been something more than a simple case of breaking and entering. There would have also have been an external reason for the Order to have withdrawn their guards on the place after Arthur's snakebite.>

This could also lead to the death of Emmeline Vance, or at least her disappearance, at the end of OotP instead of the beginning of HBP. Weren't you the one who suggested that she may have been captured while guarding the DoM? Someone did, and I liked that. Only, she could be watching from outside, like the trio do in DH, or have been Polyjuiced, since Rowling at least seemed to re-use plot elements.

<By the end of the year, the Phase II ought to have gone in with Scrimgeour getting the Dementors off the streets and back

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into Ministry "control," and the fact that the DEs swept up in the raid had escaped before the Dementors returned to the prison could have been tucked into the Quibbler, or even the Prophet. (and some of the most useful of them could have been given a blanket pardon for some bogus service or other).>

I'm all for getting rid of the Dementor fog. The more useful DEs could have been said to have been "cooperating with the Ministry" to get rid of rogue DE elements. If Stan Shunpike is released now, he could make a guest appearance for Harry to congratulate himself about "being right," just set up to be blown away during the chase from Privet Drive in DH.

I liked the Other Minister chapter. It was vaguely funny. But the same information could have been given another way, like Scrimgeour suddenly Minister instead of Fudge in Dumbledore's office, and a passing remark (or accusation to Dumbledore) about his Muggle counterpart's difficulties.

Me:

Well, in what we have now, Vance was killed around the corner from the Muggle PM's offices.

It would have worked better if it had been elsewhere on what is presumed to have been Order business.

I just suggested that her capture was likely to have been on Order business with something to do with the Muggle PM. After all, Downing St (unless that's only the residence, and not the offices) doesn't really sound like a wizarding hang-out.

Ceridwen:

I was thinking that maybe the MoM was near Downing Street

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(I think the residence and office are two parts of the same building, not positive). The WW government and the Muggle government being close to each other would make sense, to me. shrug

<It would have worked better if it had been elsewhere on what is presumed to have been Order business.>

I think she was found there because it embarrassed the Muggle PM. What I don't get, and a re-working of OotP/HBP beginning like we've been talking about could take care of this, is why were there attacks on the Muggle world now, and then not again until a year later? I think you speculated this could have been his temper tantrum at finding out about the diary, but why just stop? A take-over at the Ministry in OotP would make this a part of a larger and escalating campaign of terror for Muggle-borns by attacking their relations in seemingly random attacks against Muggles. The Muggles wouldn't piece the commonality together, but Dumbledore would.

Moving things forward would impact something I've seen discussed (ad nauseum again) recently, Marietta's scarring. By this time, they actually would be in a war, and her turning the DA in to Umbridge would be more like betrayal than just reluctance to be a part of an unsanctioned group.

Another thing that would change would be that, with Voldemort's people in charge at the MoM, he could get in to grab the prophecy himself, negating the need for Harry and Co. to go to the MoM (unless it was to stop him, and why would that stop him for good if he's basically in control?), and, due to that, would have Dumbledore telling Harry the entire prophecy much earlier in the book.

At least, I think so. I'm doing a couple of things at once here, so maybe I'm not thinking things through very well.



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Me:

Yes. Voldemort having taken the Ministry would eliminate the need for him to lure Harry into the DoM to retrieve the Prophecy for him.

Instead, he would want to lure him there to capture and kill him. Whether he would have already heard the real Prophecy and left a dummy substitute in its place wouldn't matter since, the way it played out, no one even noticed the echo of Tre-lawney giving it when it smashed. (And that would make a nice see it once/see it again, feint with the Locket.) The idea of a blank substitute would be planted in the reader's mind if Harry noticed that that globe wasn't dusty like all the others. Once it was pretty clear that Tom HAD heard the real one, Albus might have felt pressured into telling Harry as well, to level the field.

And I'm not convinced that the attacks on the Muggle world had stopped. Once Harry was at Hogwarts his only information was from the PROPHET, and it isn't likely to report attacks out in the Muggle world. (particularly not once the Ministry had effectively fallen.) It would report things like werewolf attacks and the Muggle-born registry, and the arrest of dissidents, but not a lot else.

The real problem with having the Ministry fall in Year 5 is keeping Hermione at Hogwarts in Year 6. (Not that she actually did much that was useful that year.) As well as reinstating Albus as Headmaster. Perhaps the raid on the DoM ought to have been the point at which the story broke, not that Tom was back, but that Scrimgeour was under his control. And that story need not be public. Just that the Order became aware of it.



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But the whole Muggle-born Registry nonsense would have made a lot more sense over Year 6 as a “protective measure” once Tom was known to be at large and only turned abusive when it actually did in Book 7.

We would need a different dramatic interruption of the Weasley wedding, but that ought to be easy enough to come up with.

Ceridwen:

Oh, I like the “Muggle-born Registry as Protective Measure”! The Ministry would insist that Muggle-born students **MUST** attend Hogwarts during year 6/HBP, “for their own protection”, any students not complying with Ministry edict will be forcibly taken to the school and the parents “relocated”. Of course, the Ministry under Death Eater control would actually have the Muggle-borns where they can find them when the time comes to emasculate them, charge them with stealing magic, and whatever else they plan to do. Adults would be moved to a wizarding council estate that would slowly have all rights removed, by instating curfews due to possible violence against them, wearing identifying badges (if we’re going to take the Nazi theme, then run with it), they can’t leave the ghetto without authorization papers, etc.

Dumbledore at Hogwarts would be a problem. He has to be there for Draco’s initiation/first task (Death Eater? Not yet Death Eater?) and getting him out of the way has to be a priority for some reason. If the Death Eater control of the Ministry is still secret, would Dumbledore know anyway? If the Death Eater control of the Ministry is still secret, could the murder of the Headmaster by a student/teacher be cause for the Ministry to step in overtly in

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book 7/DH (have to get a new title for that one, I think) and run it outright, with Snape again as Headmaster?

Dumbledore mentions that he’s smart, so his mistakes are bigger than other people’s: if he didn’t realize that the Ministry had fallen internally, that would be a very big mistake. Or, he could choose to remain at Hogwarts, since they want him there anyway in order to kill him and get the WW population on their side for instating their own Headmaster, in order to a) protect the students and b) teach Harry about the Horcruxes.

Dumbledore’s hand: Snape’s explanation to the Black sisters is good enough for the Ministry, I think, if they’re accepting in book 6 that Voldemort’s back.

Interruption to Weasley wedding... hm. Rounding up of Muggle-borns? “Evacuation” of foreign nationals due to state of emergency? Overt take-over of the Ministry, which had only been covert so far? Impending arrest of Harry Potter as a “person of interest” in Dumbledore’s death?

Book 5: The faux prophecy would be good. Foreshadowing the locket, yes. How would/why would Harry be lured to the Ministry? Same device, supposedly having captured Sirius? I’m assuming the same conditions under Umbridge would exist. Would they?

What about Arthur? Does he survive Nagini’s attack, or not? What sort of reprisals for Umbridge in the forest? Or will her ancestry be in question at this point, hence her taking the locket from Mundungus? Would the forest scenario feature at all?

Book 6: How would Dumbledore and Harry get out of Hogwarts to find the locket if the Ministry was keeping closer tabs on the school? Harry has his Invisibility Cloak, Dumbledore said he doesn’t need a cloak to become invisible — let that com-

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ment mean something in HBP.

Book 7: I liked the DA hiding in the RoR. Could Muggle-borns who had been interred at the school also hide there when things turn ugly, or would reprisals against the student body be too bad?

Me:

We've also got the business of Percy to contend with.

Of course that one is already a botch from Rowling. Percy wasn't a member of the Order. He had already split off from the family before the DA was formed. He's been out of touch since that abortive visit home at Christmas in Year 6. How the hell did he know to contact Aberforth Dumbledore when he started feeling uncomfortable about the direction the Ministry was taking? How, for that matter, did he even know who Aberforth Dumbledore was, in order to later have Aberforth tell him when to show up at the Hog's Head to take the tunnel to the DA hideout to mend fences with Fred?

I agree that since he was probably still on the Minister's staff he might have known that the Minister was called to Hogwarts, even that the Minister was saying something about capturing Harry Potter. But the call to arms was in the middle of the night, and how would Percy know he needed to be at the Hog's Head? (Well, I suppose that doesn't need to be a big problem. He's on the staff, the Minister contacted him, and ordered him to come.)

While we're on the subject, I think we could do without Percy accompanying the Minister to the Burrow for Christmas dinner.

I'd let Arthur be killed by Nagini. The fact that the bite is supposed to be fatal really is needed to support the fact that Snape's bite was fatal. That's wiggle-room that is awkward and unnecessary.

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So. Okay. In year 6 all the kids have to be at school. The Muggle-born Registration office starts up and goes all the way through Year 6. The Weasley wedding is interrupted by a Ministry squad which is there to attempt to arrest any Muggle-borns and take them all into "protective" custody (Shacklebolt still gives the alarm. That is the point that his cover is broken and he goes into hiding). Year 7 there are no Muggle-borns left at Hogwarts.

(Rowling botched that business too. She tried to claim after the fact that Colin only snuck back into the castle to fight along with the rest of the DA when the call went out, but she had Minerva chivvying a Creevy out of the castle during the evacuation. And that would have been Dennis, not Colin. By the end of his 6th year Colin would stand at least an 80% chance of already being of age.)

Or, since by the time of the wedding they know Harry is at the Burrow, an attempt to take him in for questioning regarding Albus's death would also work. That iteration of the story broke very soon afterwards, in Rowling's version. (If Arthur is dead by then we don't have the confusion of whether or not he continues to go to work after the wedding is crashed.) Otherwise Mundungus giving the Locket to Umbridge during the previous summer, and the forest escape could play as they are with minor tweaking.

Not sure just when the rumors ought to be started that the Ministry has fallen and is under Tom's control. (Shacklebolt abruptly recalled from the Muggle PM's office?) Perhaps Potterwatch ought to be mentioned earlier than it was. We now know that the DEs managed to muzzle Zeno Lovegood by Christmas. Even if Harry was out of touch long enough not to know that. Once the Muggle-borns started being rounded up the news couldn't have helped seeping out. Half the population

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is related to Muggle-borns.

PosterFour:

<I'd let Arthur be killed by Nagini. The fact that the bite is supposed to be fatal is needed to support the fact that Snape's bite was fatal. That's wiggle-room that is awkward and unnecessary.>

This would have been fine with me. But she couldn't. Since we're sorta talking about Percy and he's my own personal pet character, I can say this: It would have required one of two things, A; some kind of death bed-reconciliation and a happy reuniting of family... or no reconciliation, leaving the family to hate him for all eternity. If it were the former, Percy's storyline and mystery would have been wrapped up in book 5. But she kept his plot line a mystery and even kept adding to it, book after book. The latter wasn't going to happen. And when I used the word mystery, it wasn't mysterious, per se, but there was a lot going on with him that seemed to have some significance like his being shuttled from one minister to another, his constant promotions and the like. It seemed like something was going on.

Neither of the two scenarios I suggested was possible for DHs. Neither would have worked because it wasn't in "the message" she was sending in this book, which is I don't even know what at this point.

That Percy had to reconcile was a given, just as Snape being good was a given, but the pacing and arc of this book left no room for the subplot to be dealt with. So, what we get is a "Percy came to his senses by any means necessary — off the page" resolution. This, in point of fact, was Percy's whole plot line. EVERYTHING he was involved in was off the page, which

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is why many readers thought he was either Imperiused or a spy for either the order or the death eaters.

Ceridwen:

Arthur's death would be the point where Percy reconciles. He would go back to the Ministry (guy's got to have a job), and will actively be a spy for the Order there. If Rowling had killed Arthur off, I think this is how it would have played. Percy's information would give the suspicion, then the outright news, that Death Eaters were taking over. Percy is young enough that he might not twig onto some of the earlier Imperiused officials, but he'll notice odd things happening and finally see that they're under the spell.

If Percy is an Order spy, he would know to go to the Hog's Head. Aberforth is also an Order member. Percy would also know about the entrance to Hogwarts from there. Harry doesn't need to know the particulars about Percy's storyline, just that someone at the Ministry (could be any Order member still there, like Shackbolt) is passing information to the Order. Not sure if Percy's reconciliation with Arthur would be generally known, or just known to a few.

Arthur's bites and survival has been a huge problem for me, being a big Snape fan. Hermione being able to heal Harry's bite from Nagini in the Bathilda chapter added more dissatisfaction. She also staunched Ron's bleeding when he was splinched. She was at the shack when Snape died, but all she did was produce a flask to hold his memories. As my BritLit teacher says, "What's up with that?" Though I like the opening this gives to fanfic.

Wedding interrupted to take Muggle-borns into "protective custody" works. They can also intend to take Harry into custody for questioning in connection with Dumbledore's death. Everyone

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knows Harry hangs out at the Burrow and is friends with the Weasleys, it would be a two-for-one-visit shot. After this, there would be articles about wanting Harry for questioning, dovetailing with the Person of Interest thing that was going on in DH.

Muggle-born protective custody and growing suspicion of half-bloods would be logical reasons for Umbridge to seize the locket from Mundungus. Or, she could claim that she recognizes this locket, it's so-and-so's from her "Selwyn" side of the family. What could Mundungus say to that? "No, I stole it from the Blacks"? It's an obvious lie to readers, and would set Umbridge up for a reveal of being a half-blood.

Shacklebolt being driven out of his position at the Muggle PM's would also alert the Muggle government to the problems in the WW. If the Muggle PM is supposed to be in any way important, have him coordinating with Shacklebolt, even after Shacklebolt's dismissal, mentioned but never shown. The Muggle authorities would try to move Muggle relations of Muggle-borns, or something. Hermione's parents could be re-settled in Australia by the government, not by Awesome Hermione Mind Control, though in this situation, her sending them there would make more sense. Their agreeing to go rather than ambiguously being re-identified and sent, would make sense, too.

Potterwatch would start up right after the wedding invasion. On the surface, it would be a program meant to generate sightings of Harry Potter for the Ministry. Order members would somehow be informed to use a password to find a piggybacked message in the broadcast. I don't know how the trio would find out about that, but they would have to do so earlier, IMO, just so they can get what little news is available.

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I liked Xeno Lovegood's motivation to capture Harry & Co. I didn't think it played out too well, there was too huge a gap between their arrival and the Ministry's arrival. When would Luna be captured for leverage?

Possible scenario: Muggle-borns, other than Hermione who escapes from the wedding, would be rounded up and put into a ghetto, the same place where the adult Muggle-borns were brought earlier. They're put to work (slave labor) in a factory or mill. Some, like Colin Creevy, would escape and join the resistance in the hills outside of Hogsmeade, coordinated by Aberforth. This would explain Colin Creevy's presence at the Battle of Hogwarts. Otherwise, his presence is not adequately explained, IMO.

R.V. Crouch:

Actually I think the Ministry coup would not interfere with Hogwarts. In the First War Voldemort placed Severus Snape at the school. During his second rise he sent Barty Jr into Hogwarts under the guise of Alastor Moody. But he never had the courage or inclination to take Dumbledore on face to face or try to oust him. Of course, once in control of the Ministry, he could replace the board of governors with puppets and declare his own Headmaster and staff (Malfoy's tactic in CoS) But I don't think Dumbledore would obey that order once he knew the Ministry was under Voldemort's control. If Dumbledore disobeyed the only option would be to enter the school and face him or give his 'trusted advisor' the final order. So I think Book 6 still works quite well. The Draco subplot could remain because Voldemort would still have a reason to be angry at Lucius (the Diary) even if the coup had given him the Prophecy.

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Me:

Yes, book 6 would need very little alteration so far as the foreground action goes. (Most of the last half of Book 5 as well.)

Yes, Percy reconciles with his mother after Arthur is killed, mid-way book 5. (Aw hell, have the death-bed reconciliation at St Mungo's. Let the trio escape in embarrassment and wander up to the closed ward then.) He doesn't join the Order then, but is back in contact with his mother. Bill requests permanent posting in Britain to be nearer his family.

Ministry admits Tom is back when the Dementors leave Azkaban. Tom's ultimatum to Fudge in January, along with the "tantrum." Which means Scrimgeour goes into office offscreen. Shacklebolt might be sent to the Muggle PM soon afterwards, since Fudge now gets ousted right after the Azkaban Breakout. That's only a couple of weeks after Arthur is killed. Scrimgeour may have suspicions of Shacklebolt's loyalties.

We could insert the Other Minister chapter, but the PoV shift would be awkward in the middle of a book. We might simply shift just when the owl post and Floo network went under close surveillance at Hogwarts and have Ron get a letter from his mother or Bill to bring us up to speed after the Ministry change-over. I think Percy should be the one to finally realize that Scrimgeour is under DE control, and several other department heads as well. He's the one in place to do it. And the news should probably break (to the Order) in the course of the raid, or immediately afterwards.

There are a number of other shifts and details that would have to be addressed. Like Remus and the werewolves (which ended up going nowhere) and the timing on that, but I really do

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think that it would work. Probably without all that many major changes of anything but timing.

PosterFour:

I just feel that we'd have to see Percy accept the position of spy and agree to do it. Spying goes against his nature, and as we know from JKR, no one's true nature ever changes.

Me:

Maybe not even particularly active spying on Percy's part. Just anxiously contacting his brother or Shacklebolt and telling them things he is getting worried about.

I think they would wobble a bit and ask him to stay where he was and let them know if something truly odd cropped up. Like, in the event, maybe the abrupt shift from dealing with Dumbledore's will and giving Harry his legacy, and the very next day deciding to arrest him and hold him for questioning in the matter of Albus's murder.

After all, does the whole wedding reception need to be disrupted, or do we just need to get a warning to Harry and his friends? That ought to be the point at which Shacklebolt is forced into hiding as well. Remus should report that when he later shows up at #12 and asks to be taken along on the quest.

Another thing I'd be tempted to do is to completely rework or dump the debacle at the Ministry [in DHs]. Yes they actually did manage to come up with a plan to get in there. But they hadn't a clue of what to do once they got there. If they wanted the Locket, they would have been better off getting Umbridge's address (from Percy?) and doing a spot of household burglary.

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Her wards weren't likely to be any more competent than the rest of her magic. And they might have had a chance to pick up some interesting information while lurking.

If they had to get into the Ministry (in order for a DE to hitch a ride to #12 in a side-along), they could have been forced to go there for some other purpose, maybe spring someone they knew. Maybe Hermione gets identified and taken into custody.

PosterFour:

I would more likely believe that Shackbolt went to him and said, "Are you coming or not?"

ETA ... On the other hand, I can also see him saying, "I have had enough. I'm leaving to fight the good fight."

Ceridwen:

<(Aw hell, have the death-bed reconciliation at St Mungo's. Let the trio walk in on it.)>

Or have Percy walk in while the trio is there, then it gets so maudlin that they leave. Tears, hugging, blubbered confessions, everything.

<Doesn't join the Order then, but is back in contact with his mother. I think they would wobble a bit and ask him to stay where he was and let them know if something truly odd cropped up. Like, maybe the abrupt shift from dealing with Dumbledore's will and giving Harry his legacy, and the very next day deciding to arrest him and hold him for questioning in the matter of Albus's murder.>

I'm combining posts here. This seems like a more natural segue for Percy into actual spying: he falls into it rather than signs on. I can more readily buy Percy, who's been in place for

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yonks by this time, becoming an Order spy rather than Remus, who's been trying to live like a wizard rather than a werewolf. Percy's perfectly situated to notice things that the Order will need to know as soon as he can get the info to them.

<After all, does the whole wedding reception need to be disrupted, or do we just need to get a warning to Harry and his friends?>

If they're coming after Muggle-borns, the entire wedding should be disrupted. The Weasleys are known "blood traitors," everyone at the wedding will be scrutinized for blood status. If it's to take Harry in for questioning, then just the trio, or just Harry, and he can grab Ron and Hermione.

BTW, nice catch on Bill's returning to work in England. Arthur's death makes a lot of sense there.

<Shackbolt might be sent to the Muggle PM soon afterwards, since Fudge now gets ousted right after the Azkaban Breakout. That's only a few weeks after Arthur is killed. Scrimgeour may have suspicions of Shackbolt's loyalties.>

So Scrimgeour is not under Imperius when he takes office. Yaxley and his people would work on him after this, and Percy would be the informant for the Order. Which loyalties would Scrimgeour be suspicious of? That Shackbolt is an Order member? Or that he is sympathetic to the Death Eaters? I'm assuming Order, but either way would at least show that Scrimgeour is on the ball and could foreshadow a radical change in his perception to alert Percy to his being under Imperius.

<We could insert the Other Minister chapter, but the PoV shift would be awkward in the middle of a book.>

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How about paring it down to a few paragraphs at the end of the revised Book 5? Instead of introducing Scrimgeour, which I'm taking it would have happened earlier, Fudge would show up, afraid and out of breath, and tell the PM that the WW gov't has fallen and not to trust anyone.

Let me know if I'm getting the timeline straight here. I have math issues, too. Ask my poor teachers, the ones who are still coherent enough to talk.

<Another thing I'd be tempted to do is to completely rework or dump the debacle at the Ministry.>

Please, yes. If we're re-working things, let's ditch this. If they do go, have Harry leave Moody's eyeball right where it is. Why alert people that they're there? Attacking the Umbridge in her lair is more like it, IMO. Finding the locket in her jewelry box would get rid of the dichotomy of it seeming not to affect her while it affects the trio. I know there's been a post-canon interview to answer this (same one as the Harry's like Snape quote), but I'd rather see something demonstrated in the story. Call me funny that way.

<If they had to get into the Ministry (in order for a DE to hitch a ride to #12 in a side-along), they could have been forced to go there for some other purpose, maybe spring someone they knew. Maybe Hermione gets identified and taken into custody.>

That could be the outcome of the diner scene after the wedding, instead of what we got, two unconscious Death Eaters and a waitress. The trigger could still be mentioning Voldy's name, but I think we need to get that info, that saying his name would bring Death Eaters running, sooner, too.

(Post 2) Adding: The diner scene would then have to be later,

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unless the trio go to Grimmauld Place sooner, perhaps base there secretly before Harry's birthday and the wedding, to plan outside of Molly's hearing.

(shelly_nyc)

tapping foot impatiently

So which one of you is going to start writing the revised chapters/bits of DH you are so brilliantly postulating? Want Fic!

Me:

Mmmm. I think that it would be simpler for Yaxley to get Scrimgeour under control before the coup. The Ministry was too busy denying that Tom was back for six months to watch their own backs, even though the Ministry turned out to be completely infiltrated.

Bill was already in England during the summer, but I don't recall it being a permanent posting.

Percy's a bit clueless and naive, but he's bright. And he saw the real McCoy warrior mentality up close and personal with Crouch Sr. Scrimgeour may have a similar rep but if he was already under control before he took office, all sorts of little things might just seem off.

Not at all sure what to do about Fudge. He would need to be ousted in January, and Shackbolt/(Moody?)/Tonks/Lupin is a path that might report the Other Minister meeting since Kingsley was packed off to sit in his office for protection (or, just possibly, to take the fall when Tom had the wizarding world well nailed down, and started targeting the Muggle government).

ETA: the problem here is that Fudge is legitimately well-mean-

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ing. He treated his Staff very well, but even Lucius didn't bother to try to get him under Imperius. There was always a change-over planned on Tom's side. To them, Fudge didn't matter.

And, of course there would be no reproachment with the Order at all in this scenario. So we would have a bit of shifting and changing in minor areas to deal with. Albus would need to be back as Headmaster after the Dolores debacle, but it's possible the puppet Ministry wasn't ready to make an issue of the business of who was Headmaster when they had a quarter of the population to get into a position to disenfranchise, and the board of Governors were still mostly in Albus's pocket. Enough of them would get replaced over the course of the year to shift the balance.

The whole purpose of the side-alonging DE was to force them out of #12 and into the endless camping trip. So it would need to take place after capturing the Locket. But it could have taken place at any time after that.

Q: Why the hell didn't Harry call Kreachur to him at some point soon after their close shave on the doorstep, ask him if the DEs had gotten in, and if so tell him to take refuge somewhere the DEs wouldn't find him? Possibly to work out some way of having him bring them food from the Hogwarts kitchens even?

(ETA: There is no reason why the DEs should have got in. Yaxley could have got in, but he couldn't bring anyone else in. He couldn't even tell anyone else how to get in. He may have been "escorted" there by a Secret Keeper, but he wasn't suddenly a Secret Keeper. And why did Kreachur turn up at Hogwarts? That wasn't in any of his orders that we ever heard.)

.....
Ceridwen:

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<I think that it would be simpler for Yaxley to get Scrimgeour under control before the coup.>

That sounds good. Then his more public role as Minister would begin on the wrong foot and only insiders would see a change. This puts Shacklebolt, Tonks and Percy up close and personal. As you said, Percy saw the real McCoy with Crouch, but if Scrimgeour's new, with Percy's naivete, it might take some time before he twigs. Tonks would notice something, but Scrimgeour would change offices and perhaps section of the Ministry before she could put her finger on it. Shacklebolt would have been shunted to the Muggle PM's office as much to keep his nose out of the goings-on at the Ministry and to set him up for the fall.

<the problem here is that Fudge is legitimately well-meaning.>

I know. I can't help but feel sorry for the guy in that way. That's why I'd have him warn the PM at the end, when it's obvious the Death Eaters are in control. He really does mean well. Not much of a hero, but he could do this little part and disappear from the story.

<it's possible the puppet Ministry wasn't ready to make an issue of the business of who was Headmaster when they had a quarter of the population to get into a position to disenfranchise, and the board of Governors were still mostly in Albus's pocket.>

Okay, that makes sense. Albus returns, then, but under a death order, as per HBP. Voldy has Draco on first string, but Snape in reserve, and the point of getting Death Eaters into Hogwarts would be to discredit Dumbledore and any of his close staff, leading to a reorganization of the school with Snape as headmaster, according to the press.

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<The whole purpose of the side-along DE was to force them out of #12 and into the endless camping trip. So it would need to be after capturing the Locket.>

Yeah, I'm out of ideas on that one. What about one of those... what were they called? I want to call them "scavengers," but that isn't it, the ones who ultimately took the trio and friends to Malfoy Manor, if all that's needed is to show that someone could hitch an Apparation without invite. Ron could splinch even without that bounce, because they're side-alonging three instead of two, which seems to be more realistic. It seems that Ron will need to be splinched, since it's the combination of the locket horcrux and the weakness after splinching that sends him away. Does he really need to leave?

<Q: Why the hell didn't Harry call Kreachur to him at some point soon after their close shave on the doorstep, ask him if the DEs had gotten in, and if so tell him to take refuge somewhere the DEs wouldn't find him? Possibly to work out some way of having him bring them food from the Hogwarts kitchens even?>

We could make this happen. It nagged at me for chapters, wondering what happened to the elf. Harry really was an idiot here. He's supposed to be the hero, he needs to look more competent and in control.

Me:

Hermione picked up by snatchers? Well, maybe. I don't think much of it, and it wouldn't necessarily make them have to break into the Ministry to rescue her.

I'm not altogether sure that we actually need to be IN the Ministry to hear about what it is doing. The trio ought to have

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taken the risk of making contact with an Order member or two at some point during the camping trip. Learn about Potter-watch then, instead of only after Ron's return.

I think the whole point of getting rid of Ron was to raise some legitimate questions about Harry's lack of planning when he left, and to serve as an infodump when he returned. The return itself was fairly nicely handled, although I am not convinced that I buy the idea that the Deluminator could light his way back to them.

Plus, of course Rowling hadn't anything for him to do in Godric's Hollow.

Ceridwen:

I was thinking of a snatcher grabbing Hermione's arm as they Apparate, forcing them to bounce to the QWC site to begin their camping. The problem is, snatchers being able to get into #12 wouldn't be nearly as bad as the Death Eaters being able to get there. I just can't come up with something as effective without taking them to the Ministry for some reason.

Some random thoughts:

Someone should have noticed that Snape hasn't passed on the secret around the point where the Death Eaters are congregating outside. But this may have changed the plot significantly. It would have raised questions about Snape's loyalties yet again, if all they did was talk about it, nothing more. He's already ambiguous. Having one of the trio, or someone in the Order, contacting him to test a hypothesis might be interesting.

The lack of information during the camping trip really stifled the story, IMO. They needed to have fresh news. Learning

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about Potterwatch early would have provided this. They needed something to move the plot a little faster, though I appreciate that she wanted to fit things within a certain time frame.

Harry really hadn't thought things through, he just rushed off randomly because he'd been given a quest. Ron's leaving, while pointing that out, didn't really drive the point home, to me, at least. Of course, I've been saying that Harry displays the downside of Gryffindor traits for a while, with his doing first and thinking it through later. Ron's absence could have Harry thinking more about that, with Godric's Hollow reinforcing the message a little more overtly. Heck, Voldy had some pretty well-thought-out plans in GH, with Nagini in Bathilda's skin. Ron's return should be a mutual apology fest, with Harry admitting he has this flaw and showing that he's been trying to overcome it, IMO. Deluminator sure worked like *deus ex machina* there, very contrived, how to smooth that over?

Xeno Lovegood needs to be in here, for the info about the "Deathly Hallows", and to set up finding Luna with Ollivander, if those two elements are to play out as originally thought. I can't buy the Ministry taking so long to reach his house, though. They're magic, they can Apparate. *headdesk*

Me:

Well Beedle the Bard and his tales ought to have been introduced in Book 1, and to have been a continuing thread throughout the whole series. The Elder Wand ought to have come up in Binns's class and been soundly pooh-poohed by Binns, the same way he discounted any truth about Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets. There really ought to have been some other magi-

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cal wonder(s?) brought up and dismissed in Binns's class as well. This ought to have been a recurring motif in the first 5 books.

That's a problem with Rowling. She doesn't follow through on things that would strengthen the overall storyline if she did. Instead she keeps throwing disposable plot devices at us and then effectively forgetting about them.

Xeno probably couldn't have been readily introduced before book 7. And Luna was not abducted until Christmas break, so his trying to turn them in wouldn't work before that.

But it would work during the break, if the trio showed up on his doorstep within a few days after she was taken. That way no one would have realized that he no longer dared to support them, because the news that Luna was gone would not have gotten out yet. [Not even on Potterwatch.]

The trip to Godric's Hollow needs to be before the visit to Xeno, so the Peverill thread can be introduced. Hermione needed to see the symbol on the gravestone in order to ask about it.

This whole issue needs some thought.

shelly_nyc:

<There really ought to have been some other magical wonder(s?) brought up and dismissed in Binns's class as well. This ought to have been a recurring motif in the first 5 books.>

I agree. While we had shift-eyed Ollivander and the 'wand chooses the wizard' and the supposedly undetectable invisibility cloak (except, apparently for Moody) under our noses the whole time, there was nothing to even hint at other magical 'myths.' I can understand not wanting to give us too much (since we'd have sussed out the pattern pretty quickly) and trying to

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preserve some element of surprise for the last book, she could have woven in a bit more to have it really pay off at the end.

PosterFour:

I am in complete agreement.

I don't think there is any way, given what we got in the first six books, that we could have made any sort of connection between the wands, the cloak and the resurrection stone enough to get us to the legend.

In fact, there was **NOTHING** about the resurrection stone other than the "dead people can't come back" theme that goes thru the story. We got next to nothing about James' background to even hint at something deeper going on with family lines and inheritances and Peverills. And "The wand chooses the wizard" is meaningless unless we see some glimpse of wand theatrics earlier in the book. Ron's wand breaking would have been a prime opportunity to introduce that.

Yes, we got Hermione's interest in ancient runes — but it was apropos of nothing. Who would ever have thought that was a clue?

(Post 2)

Had it all been introduced earlier, it would have made a bang-up twist at the end when Harry goes searching for horcruxes only to realize it's the wand he must find.

And the trip to the graveyard could have had even **MORE** emotional impact because it really could have been more **ABOUT** James and Lily and less about Out-of-Left-Field Storylines™

Me:

What might have been helpful; would have been for Ron to dis-

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cover the deluminator's ability to get him back to the camp earlier. It would have been easy enough for some close shave with snatchers to have made them separate and have an anxious day or two before Ron found them again. After that for him to make occasional forays to his family to gather information would have helped.

Possibly one of the most contrived scenes in the whole camping trip was the infodump where Ted and his band of fugitives go fishing and have a conversation next to the disguised tent. I didn't dislike it, but I think there ought to be some better way of getting that information across. The main bit of into there was the fact that Ginny had tried to steal the Sword of Gryffindor, and that, acto the goblins, the Sword is a fake. This is information that could have come through Bill, who works with goblins.

Of course that infodump also served as the triggering point of Ron bailing out, and I am not convinced that that was even necessary. It had a gratuitous feel to it, even though Ron was convincingly fed up with Harry's lack of direction.

We don't get a fix on the date of that infodump, other than that it was in the autumn.

I would consider repositioning the appearance of the silver doe and the Sword at Halloween, or some time in November. With Ron away on reconnaissance and not expected back until the following morning.

And once the Locket was settled, that would be where they have to figure out what they are supposed to be doing next. And they haven't a clue. Xeno Lovegood might well come up as a possibility, even though what Grindelwald and his mark might have to do with anything would be hard to guess. After the side trip to Godric's Hollow, they have a better reason to ask about

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Grindelwald, even if they still haven't a clue as to where to go about the Horcruxes.

shelly_nyc:

As to the Invisibility Cloak: surely there would be a family story about this fabled cloak and how it was handed down through the years. And surely James would have shared it with Sirius/Remus. Who might have mentioned it to Harry... Why would they deny Harry this important piece of his family history?

Me:

Yes, another dangling end. It's enough to make you wonder whether the whole idea of the Hallows cropped up in the 3-year summer, and she just bunged it in at the first point that it would fit.

I mean, it certainly wouldn't have had any relevant point in OotP. And while we could certainly have done with a decent subplot in HBP I'm not sure you could have introduced it there without it taking the whole thing over. Ghod knows it wouldn't have had a lot of competition between the Quidditch and chest monsters.

PosterFour:

I find it interesting that so many readers were able to make these wonderful connections like the knight to king stuff, or the potions relating to DADA professors, but she didn't. And probably never did.

Ceridwen:

<What might have been helpful; would have been for Ron to discover the deluminator's ability to get him back to the camp

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earlier.>

He was playing with it enough. Having them forcibly separated sounds more natural than the storming out, though I think that was to set up Ron's feelings for Hermione (he asks her to go with him: she doesn't). That could be shown a different way, for instance, Harry and Hermione working out a plan for whatever they're going to be doing while Ron's gone, and Hermione brushes Ron off and he goes off in a snit.

<Possibly one of the most contrived scenes in the whole camping trip was the infodump where Ted and his band of fugitives go fishing and have a conversation next to the disguised tent.>

Did you get the feeling there was a neon sign over the area saying, "Fugitives! Camp Here!"? That was a contrivance necessary because the trio didn't have any information from outside. If Ron goes on fishing expeditions back to the Burrow, or to Shell Cottage, or to hang around outside Downing Street to talk to Shackbolt, or wherever, they wouldn't have needed this dump. For that matter, Phineas Nigellus could have filled them in on the sword caper, and Bill on both that and the rumor around Gringotts that the sword is a fake.

<I would consider repositioning the appearance of the silver doe and the Sword at Halloween, or some time in November. With Ron away on reconisance and not expected back until the following morning.>

I would plump for early November, because that's around my birthday. ;) They could be in a colder climate farther north at the time, to make the pond suitably cold for heroic diving, or have the sword stuck in a tree, or hey, how about a stone?

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Just kidding on the stone, but the same sort of idea wouldn't be bad, or without precedent. Ron could come back early with some news about an escalation in Ministry persecution of Muggle-borns or something, anything but that he got bored and lonely for his friends so he sucks up and apologizes.

Locket... Xeno... Grindelwald... Godrick's Hollow...

Yes. Just after the doe and sword, then, maybe second week of November.

<As to the Invisibility Cloak: surely there would be a family story about this fabled cloak and how it was handed down through the years.>

That's just the sort of thing friends would tell each other as soon as they could. "My family has this cool cloak, and here it is! Let's raid the kitchens!"

<It's enough to make you wonder whether the whole idea of the Hallows cropped up in the 3-year summer, and she just bunged it in at the first point that it would fit.>

It seems like it just dropped unbidden out of the sky. Is that when she started with the whole "You should ask why James didn't have his cloak" stuff? The whole storyline felt added on and shoehorned in.

<I find it interesting that so many readers were able to make these wonderful connections like the knight to king stuff, or the potions relating to DADA professors, but she didn't. And probably never did.>

She doesn't seem to have gotten that, does she? Yet, there it is, along with other patterns that seem to work out. It's really eerie how that all worked out.

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PosterFour:

I guess the question is... are we the crazy ones? She seems to always have that "you're crazy!" look on her face when you mention these kinds of things to her in interviews.

I mean, 11-year-olds sussed this stuff out, so it could go either way. But the patterns were really complex and totally supported in the text... until the last book when it was completely torpedoed.

Ceridwen:

I think the last book was Rowling pulling the books away from those dangerous, deep waters they'd been swimming toward, and back to her original vision. The stuff was there, it's just that it inserted itself and was ruthlessly pruned in the end, sort of like that bush at the end of our driveway will be by tomorrow afternoon.

anonymous:

<Is that when she started with the whole "You should ask why James didn't have his cloak" stuff? The whole storyline felt added on and shoehorned in.>

And if we did ask why James didn't have his cloak, what was there in canon up to that point that would lead anyone to suspect that the cloak was also one of a trio of death-defying devices that certain wizards in the know were trying to collect? Did she really think that sort of thing would come to mind instead of something like the cloak being used, say, to conceal an observer at Godric's Hollow?

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Jo wasn't just marching to her own drum all these years, she was in a different parade on a whole different holiday.

There was about a week of intermission here as people discussed other issues. And then we got a sort of Coda.

(Me)

This just occurred to me in reference to the fantasy rewrite project:

It isn't Scrimgeour who brings Harry and his friends their legacies from Albus. It's Fudge. The whole scene would have to be reworked. But Fudge would have been a much better bearer of this particular infodump. He's also a good link to Percy. Percy seems to have liked Fudge. He doesn't much like Scrimgeour. And they are both still in the Minister's office.

And, later in the story progression we need another scene inserted. The one where Someone, probably Fudge, but possibly Scrimgeour, if you insist on introducing Pius Thicknesse, gets forced by Tom through the Veil down in the DoM in the middle of the night. Either while Harry is on guard duty in the endless camping trip, or in a dream vision. This time Harry notices the symbol of the Deathly Hallows carved into the key-stone of the archway.

And has to raise the question of how something that he has been directly told was Grindelwald's symbol a mere 50-60 years ago managed to be carved into something that has certainly been around for centuries.

ETA: In fact, I think the murder of Fudge should probably be the first of Harry's dream/visions that comes through the reopened

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connection. Soon after the escape, while they are living at at #12.

(Ceridwen)

I like this. Yes. Fudge could hem and haw with the best of them. Not quite Joe Flynn on McHale's Navy, but a near British equivalent. And, he couldn't officially answer Hermione's question about why they kept the legacies so long, either, since he would have been out of the loop.

Fudge's ties to Percy would work well with Fudge's death via the veil. That would be a nice loop in Percy's arc (do arcs have loops?). What if an Imperiused Scrimgeour was the one to do him in, then be killed himself when he fights the Imperius at about the same time the big reveal about who's actually running the Ministry happens? Voldy would, of course, be with Scrimgeour at the veil.

Harry seeing Fudge's murder via the scar connection would be great, and the DHs symbol would reinforce its appearance elsewhere in the book. Maybe this could be the second reference, instead of Hermione pointing it out in the fairy tale book. It would also present an interesting "mystery," as you say, of how it was Grindelwald's sixty year old symbol yet is on an ancient artifact. Possible erroneous conclusion could be that the veil isn't ancient after all, but was something Voldy used in the first VoldWar, or something that was confiscated after Grindelwald's defeat.

<In fact, I think the murder of Fudge should probably be the first of Harry's dream/visions that comes through the reopened connection. Soon after the escape, while they are living at #12.>

As early as possible. The story needs to get going a lot earlier

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than it does.

Me:

I can't remember just when the Harry/Voldemort connection reopened*. I know it was pretty early, but cannot recall exactly when. That was never really explained either. I am left with the impression that it had something to do with the incident where Harry's wand went on autopilot and attacked Tom on its own. But can't figure any way that that would have opened the connection and bypassed Tom's Occlumency shield.

Maybe Tom had simply gone past a threshold point of murders and his soul was simply no longer stable enough for him to really be able to maintain Occlumency against Harry. Maybe none of the fragments of soul left in the simulacrum were any larger than the one in Harry.

I do know that the dream vision of Tom asking about Gregorovitch took place even before the wedding, and needed to, but that was a dream, not a waking vision. So the Fudge vision, or dream, couldn't really be the first one, but it still could be pretty early, and make it clear to Harry that; yes, the connection is open again.

ETA: I don't think that Hermione brought up the symbol in the book until a good deal later. But I haven't done a reread yet.

(*ETA: it was the same night the amazing Auto-wand went into action. And the first vision was of Voldemort torturing Ollivander. I really think we might have managed without that. The Fudge vision/dream would at least have seemed more mysterious if it had only been preceded by scar prickling and the Gregorovitch dream. We could have had an Ollivander vision later if we had to have one.)



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Ceridwen:

I'm not thrilled with the mind-reading device, since it sometimes tells Harry what Voldy is thinking, and at other times, it doesn't, which of course protects the missing elements in the plot. The fragments being too unstable makes the most sense to me so far. Otherwise, we're left with Harry suddenly being magically powerful enough to break through the Occlumency, or Voldy mysteriously becoming too arrogant to maintain the Occlumency after the wand incident.

The Fudge dream coming just after the wedding would have Harry thinking about the connection, and would give information. I think Hermione noticed the symbol in the book at some point in the interminable camping sessions. She thought it was an original part of the book. I suppose Dumbledore used a spell to put it on that page. I haven't done a re-read either. I was really disappointed with this book.

Me:

Yeah, the Gregorovitch dream could "just be a dream," since of course Harry knows that Tom is using Occlumency against him. The Fudge dream would be a literal wake-up call.

Damn! None of this is particularly difficult to think up. Why the hell didn't Rowling find someone she could trust to bounce ideas off of, and work it out before she wrote it? Then we wouldn't have this mess.

Ceridwen:

The Fudge dream, then Remus's visit and the paper mention-



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ing that Fudge has been missing X days. Harry's told Ron and Hermione his vision, but Hermione insists that the connection is still closed, per Dumbledore, until they see the headline and realize he's been gone exactly the amount of days between Harry's vision and the paper's publication date. Outside verification.

Which was pretty much the end of the discussion in this iteration.

Comparatively little actually changes in the fantasy rewrite other than the timing, and the explanations given. Although all that repositioning would require a whole lot of background and detail shifts. (Particularly doing without Arthur for the last 2 and a half books.) But I really do think that we thrashed out a lot of very promising possibilities there. Even though a few points would probably need more in-depth exploration before whoever chose to do it worked all the potential bugs out.

But upon the whole, I think I agree with shelly_nyc. Want Fic!



Colophon

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Special mention should also be extended to Jack Davis and Linea Dayton for their efforts in producing The Photoshop 7 One-Click WOW Book. More than a decade later, their layer styles still constitute one of my first go-tos.

Graphics design by J. Odell (J0del@aol.com)