

The Red Hen Essay Collection



Vol. 3  
REGARDING THE  
**POTTERVERSE PART III**  
The Briar Patch, Out on a Limb...  
The 7th Son, Endgame,  
Scorecard





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# The Red Hen Essay Collection



Vol.3

## REGARDING THE POTTERVERSE PART III

The Briar Patch  
Out on a Limb...

The 7th Son  
The Endgame Assortment  
Scorecard

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## Regarding the Potterverse Part III

# The Briar Patch

Wherein breed plot bunnies.

Anything here reads more like  
fiction than theory

Not that it should be taken as  
*nothing* but a flight of fancy...



## The Significance of 1945



## The Significance of 1945

Well, okay. This one got quite thoroughly hosed. It's *just* possible that not everything in it got exploded in DHs but pretty nearly all of it did.

But, really, leaving aside divine guidance there wasn't anything in the text prior to Chapter 2 of DHs to serve as a pointer regarding any of the official Grindelwald backstory. We were completely on our own there. Rowling was evidently determined to surprise us all, and she certainly did — without any regard to the *quality* of that surprise.



I'm mildly curious as to whether Rowling had any idea of how — given that nothing in the storyline until we had actually embarked on the final book could have ever given us at least a hint of who Grindelwald even *was*, or what he had tried to do — she thought we would still even particularly care. Assuming she was expecting us to still believe he had ever actually *mattered*?

Even if the early connection to Albus had still come out of left field at the last minute, we ought to have at least been given some reason to think he was relevant prior to *that*.

Which she might very easily have done. There wasn't any reason for the early connection to Albus to have been brought up in the public record. The connection to Bathilda Bagshott might have been harder to conceal. Particularly given that they were both pretty big names, even if for wildly different things on opposite ends of Europe.

Although perhaps not all that different really. She recorded (\*cough\*distorted\*cough\*) history. He made it.



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But for Rowling to not give anyone any hint *at all*? All we had was a bit of puffery on Albus's chocolate frog card which identifies him as a Dark wizard, defeated in 1945. Frankly, given the number of times we've seen people throwing around allegations and accusations of Dark magic at anything they don't recognize in this series, that doesn't give us much to reason from.

But, for the most part this essay has been left in more or less it's HBP-compliant form. There has been a bit of adjustment and some additions in reflection of DHs, but the basic premise hasn't been reworked to reflect Rowling's version.

After all, why should it? Exploded theories can still have entertainment value. You are all quite welcome to point and laugh.

Although, once considered, this one is less an exploded theory, than a flight of fancy, so it is here in the Briar Patch, rather than the 7th Son sub-collection.



For years, one of the most widespread fanon theories floating about, regardless of a total lack of any support inside canon, was the conviction that — despite the fact that Rowling had shown us nothing whatsoever, in canon, of what kind of “threat” that the “Dark wizard Grindelwald” represented — it must have been considerable.

For that matter, the conviction seemed to be that whatever degree of threat he represented, in type it must have been political.

This conviction rests solely upon the premise that; if Albus Dumbledore, who defeated him, is reputed to be “Considered by some to be the greatest wizard in modern times,” then, if Dumbledore is great, and he is “most famous” for defeating

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Grindelwald, then it follows that Grindelwald must have been pretty hot stuff.

Why everyone was so convinced that it was all about politics seemed to be entirely based upon the fact that the name sounds Germanic and he was defeated in 1945.

I'll admit I was less than altogether convinced by that line of reasoning. And in retrospect it seems to have been yet another instance of Rowling using the realities of our world to try to dress her world up and make it look more convincing.

Without ever giving us anything to *support* it.

Linking the defeat of a Germanic-sounding Grindelwald and the year 1945 does not equate to the defeat of the 3rd Reich, in our own world, in that year. It only pretends to. It is a false parallel. Or, in other words; it's fake.

The parallel looked progressively more and more fake as the series continued and Rowling repeatedly dismissed or ignored or contradicted any element which would have supported the contention that the Potterverse had ever had anything like a 3rd Reich goose-stepping about in it. And in DHs she finally renders the whole assumption into gibberish by claiming that Grindelwald never took his war to Britain at all.

Despite Rowling's apparent 11th-hour endorsement of that particular piece fake reasoning, she still provides *nothing* within canon to support it. She tells us *ex-cathedra*, that there were both wizard and Muggle global wars feeding off each other — with no explanation of how that was supposed to actually *work*, and then in the final book informs us that the wizarding war never touched Britain, which breaks every connection that the readers and theorists had been attempting to establish since we



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were first shown Albus Dumbledore's chocolate frog card. She then further tests our gullibility by trying to claim that all of this fighting was somehow ended by a one-on-one duel between two wizards — who Muggles do not believe exist.

All of this after having already summarily (and consistently) ignored the existence of any wartime conditions related to a Muggle conflict throughout the entire series, I find her whole postulation of any mid-century war about as insupportable as her claim that HBP and DHs were somehow two halves of the same story — which was another piece of hooey that she was palming off on us at about the same time as she was claiming that the Muggle and wizard wars were feeding off one another. The only thing in the entire series that would indicate that any kind of a war had ever taken place in the 20th century of the Potterverse was a war memorial in Gdric's Hollow and the fact of Frank Bryce having come home from one with a stiff leg.



Most fan writers bought the package, however, and almost universally run away with the 1945 date given for Grindelwald's defeat, postulating a Germanic Dark Lord wannabe in the full-dress Lord Voldemort style, either working hand-in-glove with Adolf Hitler, or using the disruption of WWII as a cloak under which to conceal his own activities.

Some of them managed to make it work. After a fashion.

But I didn't buy that scenario either. Or not wholesale, anyway. I still don't. Not even in the face of Rowling's support of it. Rowling shows us no evidence in modern wizarding society that would indicate that such events had ever taken place. Cer-



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tainly not with the scope she tries to claim. Not without either Muggle detection, or wizarding recollection and discussion for generations afterward. Wizards would not have effectively *forgotten* about it by Harry Potter's day. It is simply not feasible.

I was particularly frustrated for some time in that there was allegedly an interview by a young fan by the name of Owen Jones who won the right to interview Ms Rowling as a part of a newspaper contest. This interview was allegedly posted somewhere online, in 2005, in which a number of questions concerning Grindelwald were allegedly raised. This posting steadfastly refused to load, so I have never been able to access it, and had to make do with a 3rd-party paraphrase. (I have yet to track down the transcript of this interview. It was made around the time of the release of HBP and printed in an Irish paper.)

However, a later round of dodging toppling dominoes resulted in some long-overdue development on this particular issue.

In a whole new direction, too. I even thought I might be approaching some kind of an off-market solution to the puzzle.



With the release of HBP, I believed that I might have been missing what could be a key piece of the puzzle.

And the solution to that part of the mystery appeared to be more wide-ranging than simply being able to file Grindelwald into what seemed to be his proper context.

It was now suggested that my original contention that the Grindelwald affair was not unconnected to the matter of Tom Riddle might not be altogether incorrect — although the connection might be far less direct and not at all in the style that I had imagined it.





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We had been assuming since OotP was released in 2003 that Albus was appointed Headmaster around Dec '56/January '57 on the grounds of Minerva's statement that she was hired at that time.

Albus had been the Transfiguration teacher in the early 1940s. Minerva is the Transfiguration teacher now.

Ergo: Minerva was hired to fill Albus's suddenly vacant former position when he was promoted. Right?

Well, it seems, not necessarily.

In fact it began to look like possibly not at all. After the release of HBP, the dominoes were falling like rain, and a couple of puzzle pieces finally clicked into place. One of them was a spanking new piece, only introduced in HBP. The other has been lying around underfoot, and getting very much in the way, ever since the beginning of the series.



The fact that Albus was once, and Minerva is now Transfigurations teacher for the school does not, in fact, establish just when Albus became Headmaster. We'd all been overlooking somebody. Admittedly this was somebody that we were not aware even existed until HBP had been released.

Allow me to suggest the following adjustments to the Master timeline, while dishing myself up a nice helping of crow:

**1945** — Tom Riddle sits his NEWTs to his typically outstanding results.

Long-time DADA Professor Galatea Merrythought



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finally announces her retirement. (Forgot all about her, didn't we? Well, in all justice I can't see any way in which *we could* have since we hadn't known she *existed*.)

Tom requests the DADA position from Headmaster Dippet.

On the advice of Albus Dumbledore, Dippet declines Riddle's request recommending that he gain a few years experience first.

In order to sweeten the deal to Dippet — and to further remove the class from Riddle's reach, Albus (fresh from his defeat of Grindelwald — according to this scenario probably during the Easter break) offers to take the class himself.

An offer which is happily accepted. Some solid information on the exact date and the circumstances of the Grindelwald defeat would come in awfully handy around this juncture, but I wouldn't recommend holding one's breath in hopes of it. (Just as well. Rowling gave us no more information on this issue in book 7 than she had in book 1.)

One does reflect that in our own world, V-E day was officially May 8. That's well before the end of the school year and Grindelwald would seem to have been more likely to have been defeated before the end of the Muggle war than after. Or, in other words, before the end of the 1944–1945 academic Year. The year Tom Riddle was Head Boy. It is also probably not too much to speculate that the whole business may have had something to do with Professor Merrythought finally deciding to throw in the towel.

It finally fits.





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**1945** — Unidentified new Transfigurations teacher is hired.

**December 1956** — In the middle of the academic year, Unidentified Transfigurations teacher is abruptly no longer at Hogwarts for unspecified reasons. Minerva is hired as his or her replacement.

Winter, exact year unknown (some 10 years after Riddle's disappearance from wizarding Britain anyway) — Albus is appointed Headmaster. Riddle returns to request the DADA post — which he knows is now *vacant*. And when Albus wouldn't give it to him he jinxed it so no one else would have it either.

It ALL finally fits.



Minerva tells us outright that she was hired in December/January. The snow falling outside the window when Riddle shows up to congratulate Albus on his Headmaster appointment is an open invitation to leap to the conclusion that this is the same December/January in which Minerva was hired. And of course it *could* be. But the narrative never comes out and *tells* us so. For that matter, there isn't really anything to say that Tom wasn't congratulating Albus on an appointment of some months' standing — his having been out of the country, after all.

And we already know that Minerva isn't the only teacher to have come on staff mid-year. Sybill also came on board after the academic year had commenced. But If Albus was suddenly appointed because Professor Dippet had just died, then his appointment might not even have been during a term break, although we can probably conclude that it was during the winter.

The remaining, and most significant "missing piece" to this

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puzzle is the date that Tom Riddle murdered Hepzibah Smith and absconded with at least two of her treasures. And we have never been told that. Nor will we be.

Without knowing that date, we can't really get a solid handle on the timing of the rise of Lord Voldemort. We can extrapolate any number of about equally plausible alternatives, but we haven't anything solid.

For the record. I think that even if my theories regarding Tom's boyhood, as outlined in the essay entitled 'Minding the Gap' are completely out to lunch, Riddle still got himself hired on at B&B specifically in order to look for traces of that locket that had been in his mother's family. Morfin told him about that locket, *Slytherin's* locket, when Tom finally made his way to the Gaunt's hovel in the summer of '42. Borgin & Burkes is probably one of the most prominent dealers in magical antiquities in wizarding Britain — a fact that Riddle was fully aware of by the time he finished school. The chances were that sooner or later the locket, or whoever purchased it, was going to cross the threshold there. And Tom was wagering his time and effort that he would eventually be able to trace the locket through the shop records.

If he had access to the shop's records dating back to the mid-1920s he might have done so very quickly. The transaction(s) concerning it are bound to have been in those records. It may have taken him very little time to ingratiate himself with Madam Smith, who appears to have been a serious collector and a valued repeat customer. His murder of Madam Smith and his decade-later return under a new name may have taken place every bit as quickly as we have been assuming. But we



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just cannot be sure of it.

We do have less than a decade of potential spread, however. The earliest plausible date of a return would probably be around the same Dec/Jan 1956-7 that Minerva was hired. About the latest probable date would be a different Dec/Jan around 1960-'63. In any case, it was certainly earlier than the mid-'60s, when Fudge claims that the Ministry became aware of Lord Voldemort and his activities. Riddle was still visibly quite young before his first disappearance from the ww. Although he may perhaps have been as old as 25 or so. But he is not likely to have been significantly more than that.

Since it seems to have taken the Ministry until around '66 or '67 before it woke up and realized that this "Death Eater" outfit was a real problem and wasn't going away, we don't get a clear idea of just when his activities actually got started, either, although Albus appears to have picked up rumors of something before Riddle even asked him for that job interview (note: in retrospect that particular allusion may even have been referring to activities that took place *before* Tom's trip to Albania. It could also have been in connection to a not precisely illegal "Lord Voldemort" hoax that he may have already been engaged in perpetrating on wizarding society). It was probably not until a few years after their inception that the DEs started sending up the Dark Mark as their signature, which would further confuse the issue. (Hard for the Ministry to ignore that...)

But finally being able to fit Galatea Merrythought into the picture where she seems to belong does seem worth the effort and then some. After all, if she didn't fit anywhere, why was she even introduced?



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Of course this now raises the question of why, in general. Why did Rowling decide to sneak this issue past us in such a manner? What kind of purpose is supposed to be served by the sudden suggestion that Albus "oh shocking!" might have been the DADA teacher before becoming Headmaster? And, incidentally, the last one to hold the position for more than one year. So what? Talk about elephants straining to bring forth mice. What is the point?

We don't know what year Albus's Headmaster appointment was. But I am pretty confident that Rowling doesn't think we need to know. We, of course disagree with her, but a lot of good that will do.

Frankly we are in danger of losing our way in the forest due to paying excessive attention to the individual trees. But this sort of opacity is nevertheless a real issue in this series.

Why is Rowling being so cagey about just when Riddle started his rise? Or when Albus became Headmaster? Or who taught what subject when? Hell, what year and month the ruddy Prophecy was even made?

And does any of it even matter to the tale that she is telling? By this time, I am not altogether convinced that it does. It matters to the tales that some of *the fans* want to tell. It matters a whole lot to the "grand unified theory of everything" that the theorists among us want to build. But I cannot see that any of it was ever going to have any plausible impact upon where the Horcruxes were, or how Harry was supposed to defeat Riddle when he finally faced him.





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And, perhaps worst of all, this coyness was no longer heightening suspense, it was being aggravating for the sake of being aggravating, and creating distraction and fake mystery that goes nowhere.



Which brings us back to Grindelwald. As of the end of HBP, we still didn't know why he was introduced to the series either.

It does now *look* as if he was supposed to have been involved with some variant of WWII, after all. Even if Rowling never bothered to finish the job of building him (or WWII) into the Potterverse in any plausible manner.

Hence my dinner of crow casserole.

But I still didn't buy any of the Dark Lord Grindelwald theories which have been clogging the internet since the fandom found its way online. And I still didn't see any reason why I should. And I am still not even convinced that they are feasible. No, not even in the wake of DHs. Although I have to admit that any number of the variants produced in fanfic are more feasible than Rowling's.

If Grindelwald had ever been any sort of Hitleresque Dark Lord wannabe, people would *remember* him. And they would *talk* about it. In our own world, now spinning apparently uncontrollably toward some new iteration of a major war somewhere, comparisons with WWII are on everyone's lips. If the "Dark wizard Grindelwald's" activities had ever been in that style, then his career would be under constant discussion. Even if only because, now that he is definitely out of the way, it would be *safe* to natter on about Grindelwald, as it is apparently still



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not considered safe to speak of Lord Voldemort.

Unless, of course, Grindelwald's career was nipped in the bud, and the threat never got into the DAILY PROPHET, or much into the public consciousness. Which — if he was a continental political power — seems most unlikely, and contradicts the whole myth about Dumbledore's abiding fame for having defeated him right there. You can hardly be all that widely famous over something that is, at most, a minor footnote in history, that nobody knows anything about.

Rowling belatedly attempts to beg the question by claiming that his activities took place at the opposite end of Europe, and that Britain wasn't much concerned with him. But that really doesn't wash. Particularly not when she also claims that people were begging Albus to take care of the problem for five years before he was finally shamed into doing it. (And why did they dump their problem on Dumbledore, he was a scholar, not a warrior. I say Rowling is just trying to have it both ways, and I don't believe a word of it.)



A friend of mine (reads the books, in fact was the person who pointed them out to me in '97 so I was waiting when they jumped the pond — but who is not, himself, in the fandom) has mentioned that the books feel like they would play more smoothly if they had been set in the 1950s.

He is quite right, too. They would. The only thing at all that goes against such an assignment is some of the Dursley tech. Some of which is wrong anyway, as people have often enough pointed out. Some of Dudley's various electronic toys didn't





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exist yet at the date he was supposedly given them. Rowling is obviously writing the series off the top of her head and doesn't even bother to keep the contemporary "history" straight.

But the more I think about it, the more it seems that Rowling really missed a trick by not setting the series in the 1930s. And, again, the only thing that flies against it is the Dursley tech.

If Harry was born in say, 1920 and started Hogwarts in 1931 the reader would actually get the weird parallels between the wizarding and Muggle worlds (or, rather, our world) that Rowling claims that she has in the back of her mind. The readers, at least the older ones, would definitely be able to pick the historical parallels up, and it would enrich the text. The characters might miss out on it, but they completely miss it as it is, and the characters don't need to be aware of it.

You'd also get a far better context for reading the wizarding world *vis-à-vis* the Muggle one. From the standpoint of the 1990s the ww looks hopelessly backward. But it really isn't. It's only technologically backward, and it only looks like that because it operates on an entirely alternate technology.

From a standpoint of the 1930s, the ww would look quite progressive socially, (which would have eliminated a fair degree of the flack Rowling catches for her portrayal of the status of females right off the top) and it would give us a bit of additional context to interpret the degree of agitation which is being demonstrated by the DE faction. And we'd possibly not be going; "But... but..." over the British Ministry of Magic's authority over the Irish Quidditch League. Or at least not quite so loudly.

By throwing the whole boiling back to the '30s just about everything falls more into place, Tom's vaguely Dickensian

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orphanage could be an *authentically* Dickensian orphanage, the Gaunt's primitive rural sty fits the era, the Dursley's uptight concern for what the neighbors think also. Any number of things play better if this is happening in the '30s.

Frank Bryce could have gotten his stiff leg off in Afghanistan (along with Dr. John D. Watson?) it would have been a couple of years after that conflict before Tom showed up at the Riddle House, but there appears to be no reason whatsoever for why the war in which Bryce was injured needs to be an ongoing one when the murders actually took place. Rowling never actually showed us, or claimed, that there was a war *in progress* when those murders took place. In fact, at the end of the series, I'm not even convinced that there was one. Rowling makes no use of it as such in the course of the narrative. There is no indication whatsoever that the war that Frank was invalidated home from had ever touched that village.

Grindelwald would probably be being conflated with Otto von Bismarck. Much of VoldWar I would have been carried on under the cover of the Muggle WWI, and any supernatural elements would have escaped Muggle notice.

Albus Dumbledore would have been born in 1821 (lost his father to Azkaban in 1831, his mother and sister to death in 1839 right around the time Victoria came to the throne) and if my own reading of the backstory is correct, he would have been a young boy during the time that the Hogwarts Quill was first put into commission and the MoM adopted the policy of aggressively seeking out and recruiting Muggle-borns. Kendra, if still intended to be a Muggle-born would probably have hailed from one of the traditional semi-wizarding villages, been iden-



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tified young by a wizarding neighbor and trained as a witch. Or, she might have been acknowledged as the daughter of a Squib. Moving the family from Mould-On-The-Wold to Godric's Hollow in the aftermath of the scandal might even have been a return to her own childhood home.

Albus would have started Hogwarts right about the time the first or second wave of newly discovered Muggle-borns identified by the Hogwarts Quill did. He would have defeated Grindelwald in 1885 — with no arbitrary requirement for the war Grindelwald might have been involved in being “global”, and been appointed Headmaster somewhere between the start of 1897 to 1902.

Tom Riddle would have been born at the end of 1866. He'd have shown up at the Gaunt hovel in the summer of '82. He'd have finished Hogwarts in '85, and murdered Hepzibah Smith and gone into his first exile perhaps around 1887-1893.

(As an interesting side note, the Whitechapel/Jack the Ripper killings took place in London in 1888. The number of alleged victims varies by report. Generally accounted to be five, by some accounts as many as seven, or as few as four. A Horcrux creation, anyone? One of those killings could have been a ringer.)

His return would have been sometime between the later half of 1896 to early 1903 or thereabouts. The Ministry would have finally realized that shutting down “Lord Voldemort” and his band of terrorists needed to be a priority at some point in the first decade of the 20th century. He would have rendered himself unmentionable around 1910. His first defeat would have been on Halloween of 1921.

The Marauder cohort would have been born in 1899–1900.

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Their Hogwarts years would have been 1911–1918. The Prophecy would have been made at some point between Halloween 1919 (right around the date of the Muggle Armistice?) and the beginning of January 1920.

Given how little attention to historical compliance Rowling expends in the version she did tell, dressing the series up in “period” costume wouldn't have taken all that much extra work. Even if she put no more effort into historical plausibility than she has done as it is. But at least we would know from the outset that we were not expected to take any of the history seriously.

I mean it's not like we would expect it of her. Or expect her to get it right. We would have seen how slipshod her period research was by the time we got halfway through Book 1 and by this time we would not even try to hold her to any kind of an accurate historical context, but just blow it off as; “Well, it's Rowling, all the history is bunk.”



But, regardless of whatever “might have beens” may be lurking in the background; if there'd ever been an acknowledged national emergency over Grindelwald at the time, wizards would still be talking about it and about his era. They would be drawing comparisons of it to VoldWar I which started up no more than 20 years later. Out here in the mundane world we still hear people discussing WWI, and comparisons routinely get drawn between it and WWII. The landscape of Great Britain is littered with War Memorials commemorating these conflicts. But to the end of HBP has anyone in the wizarding world ever even mentioned Grindelwald?



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Not a peep. Grindelwald, so far as we'd seen, was nothing more than a name on a chocolate frog card. If Grindelwald was ever indeed a threat to the wizarding community on the order that he is usually portrayed in fanfic, this would simply not be the case.

Or — Theories 'R' Us — perhaps the nature of the threat of Grindelwald's activities was of such a vastly different caliber to that of Voldemort's that it never occurs to anyone to compare the two.



Well, Rowling allegedly (in the Owen Jones interview) claims that she sees the Potterverse as a reflection of ours, so Grindelwald was presumably kicking up his heels during the Muggles' WWII, and that this is supposed to have had some significance. I cannot get at that interview, but she did give us a recap in the "joint interview" later the same month:

The following is excerpted from the joint interview of July 2005 shortly after HBP was released:

*ES: Our other "Ask Jo" question (the one about James and Lily's sacrifices), was from Maria Vlasious, who is 25, of the Netherlands. And then the third is from Helen Poole, 18, from Thirsk, Yorkshire - also one of the "Plot Thickens" fan book authors. It's the one about Grindelwald, which I'm sure you've been gearing up for us to ask.*

*JKR: Uh huh.*

*ES: Clearly —*

*JKR: Come on then, remind me. Is he dead?*

*ES: Yeah, is he dead?*

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*JKR: Yeah, he is.* (Well, he was by 2005, he wasn't at that point in the series. She lied in her teeth there)

*ES: Is he important?*

*JKR: [regretful] Ohhh...*

*ES: You don't have to answer but can you give us some backstory on him?*

*JKR: I'm going to tell you as much as I told someone earlier who asked me. You know Owen who won the [UK television] competition to interview me? He asked about Grindelwald [pronounced "Grindelvald" HMM.]. He said, "Is it coincidence that he died in 1945," and I said no. It amuses me to make allusions to things that were happening in the Muggle world, so my feeling would be that while there's a global Muggle war going on, there's also a global wizarding war going on.*

*ES: Does he have any connection to —*

*JKR: I have no comment to make on that subject.*

*[Laughter.]*

*MA: Do they feed each other, the Muggle and wizarding wars?*

*JKR: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. Mm.*

Do these interview quotes really sound as if she'd ever actually thought about it? Really considered it at all? She didn't even claim that she thought about it. She says it was a "feeling"; it "amused" her to make the allusions. It sounds to me more like a vague "oh gee, that's a cool idea, let's have one of those, too." without ever really examining it to see whether it made any kind of sense, let alone actually fit the story. To call it half-baked is to pay it a compliment!



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She doesn't even clue us in that Grindelwald did *not* die in '45.

And while all that *may* have been her original intention, she certainly had not put any of it into the books. And by that point in the series she really ought to have.



For that matter: taking Rowling at her word, that she sees her world as a reflection of this one, if Grindelwald's "war" is supposed to be a reflection of WWII, then what — given that it lasted from approximately 1957 (or 1960ish) to 1981 — was Vold-War I? The Cold War? It certainly doesn't appear to reflect that period very well. I lived through the Cold War. There was a lot of home grown paranoia being sown and reaped, but it certainly didn't look like a shooting war from where I was standing. So is it Korea? Viet Nam? The IRA, perhaps? Well, maybe the IRA. The times are right as far as it goes, But, iirc, the IRA went on raising havoc for a good while longer than Voldemort did.

But from our vantage point at the end of Book 6 Grindelwald really sounded very much like something that Rowling had just tossed in off the top of her head without ever having taken the time to think the matter all the way through to the end, or to determine where it actually fit. Either he was a bit of flotsam connected to an original intention that she never was able to fit into the story, like Hermione Granger's Muggle sister, or he was something she tossed in as set dressing and she never really intended to follow through on.

Or the other shoe was yet to fall, and the punch line would probably turn out to be another one of her silly jokes. Anything in the Potterverse that has to do with history usually did.



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Rather like the whole issue of international wizarding Seclusion in itself, when you stop to examine it. That is a totally Euro-centric piece of legislation. It was a response to the fall-out of the bloody (and it was bloody) Protestant Reformation. Most of the rest of the world didn't have one of those. So we can get all kinds of tribal wizards and shamans and medicine men at the World Cup, and I seriously doubt that they are living in wizarding seclusion in their native lands. But the wizards living in what were once European colonies and major European settlements in those very same countries probably were. There is bound to be an overlap, but "international" doesn't necessarily mean "worldwide" — and it certainly doesn't mean "universal".

And we are the ones who get stuck with having to sort it out and try to reconcile it, because Rowling certainly wasn't going to take the trouble. She had other fish to fry. But there is no reason why we should feel that we have to make every detail match up just exactly. Particularly since the whole idea seems to have been at least partially intended as an inside joke.

And it certainly isn't supportable in any meaningful manner, not given the totally inadequate population numbers she seems to expect to have been carrying out this alleged global war. The woman claims that the whole wizarding population of Great Britain and Ireland is about 3000 for heaven's sake! At that rate, the entire population of the "wizarding world" of the planet would be well under half a million!



I'm having a real problem wrapping my brain around any practical manner in which wizards would be tinkering with full-





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scale, industrialized Muggle warfare. Particularly if not in any official capacity. Assuming that no one is sending out Armadas that could be routed by a conveniently-placed storm — which actually might be halfway plausible — but no one ever suggested that Grindelwald was doing that. Instead, Grindelwald now seems to have not attempted to take his war to Britain at all.

Considering the way wizards seem to view Muggle society in general, you would expect that they might wave the flag, mouth the national propaganda, and calmly sit the whole thing out. Viewing it as a sort of spectator sport, rather like Quidditch, only more inconvenient, and not as engaging.

Mind you, I don't have all that much trouble believing that *individual* wizards with a higher than average degree of nationalism or social conscience might mix in — with or without the sanction of their national Ministries of Magic. We were all led to imagine that, back in the day, Albus kept an eye on the British Muggle war effort and that if he saw an opportunity to give it a nudge, might do so. (It's nowhere nearly so easy to imagine it now. In fact, it's hard to imagine it at all.)

But I certainly don't see him leaving the country to do it. Particularly not when he already had a day job.

However, at that point in the series (the end of HBP) the field was still wide open for theorizing about Grindelwald and his activities.

Well, okay. I was up for that.



From the vantage point of the end of HBP, whatever her original intentions, Rowling had not followed through on the issue of Grin-

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delwald, and from what she showed us, rather than simply telling us (which was virtually nothing), certainly did not support the contention that Grindelwald was any sort of a continental super-power.

Conversely; it was also entirely possible that "Grindelwald" was about as authentic a name as "Voldemort." Indeed, Grindelwald could have been the completely bogus *nom de crime* of a wizard whose day-to-day identity was something perfectly ordinary and whose public persona was perfectly respectable. Although I did not insist on that.

And I would still have hesitated to call it the "Grindelwald war." We just plain hadn't the information we needed to be able to call it that. He seems to have been involved in it, but we had no reason to believe that he was in charge of it. The fact that no one had ever seemed to even think to mention him suggested to me that he wasn't that high in the hierarchy of it.

And IF he was involved in the war — as now seemed most likely — in what capacity would a wizard be best suited to meddling in a Muggle conflict in an industrialized era?

Not, I think, in leading charges and planning raids.

Probably not even as a sniper at the front.

No, I rather think that the most effective uses for magical ability in an industrialized war might be in espionage. And possibly sabotage.



Well, being older than 80% of the fandom is usually an advantage when it comes to spinning theories, but sometimes there are disadvantages, as well.

In this case, the fact that when I was in school, the more-



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or-less unofficial 50-year moratorium on saying anything about recent history in the classroom, meant that any history class I was dragged into (sulking and grumbling all the way) rarely got as far as WWI, and they usually bogged down so thoroughly in the Reconstruction era that we barely made it to the end of the 19th century. Anything within the last 50 years you were evidently supposed to learn about outside the classroom. Probably from your parents or grandparents.

Consequently, I didn't realize that those silly Nazis chasing around after the Ark of the Covenant in 'RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK' were based on something that actually existed!

Evidently there was a significant faction in the upper ranks of the SS who were very much into occultism. From the sound of it they had a whole premise and mythos they were working from that for fanciful self-delusion would have put most of the nut cults that have sprung up over the course of my own lifetime to shame.

Well, hey, with something like *that* in the picture, I'd say it was an open invitation for some wizard to get ideas about mixing in..

And doing it just for the hell of it, even! Enter Grindelwald theory Mark II.

Even though Rowling can't be arsed to support her own premise that there even *was* a mid-century war, this model makes one allowable. And generally ignored by British wizards, since it would have been officially an all-Muggle production.

We don't know what Grindelwald's own motives were. It could have been the Willy Widdershins model of sniggering up one's sleeve as one jerks the stupid Muggles around. It could have



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been the Lucius Malfoy model where you go; "Hm, so these Muggles want to make use of arcane powers, do they? I'll bet if I showed them some I could take the whole thing over in next to no time." Or he could have been a genuinely patriotic Nazi sympathizer who thought that a Nazi victory was such a Good Thing that it was worth breaking a few Ministry rules over.

So what does that all add up to?

Can you say: "gross violation of the International Statues on Wizarding Secrecy"? There, I was sure you could.

And that could have been what blew it up into a "global" conflict — at least on the wizarding front, and what classified Grindelwald as a "Dark wizard" right there. He was deliberately putting wizarding secrecy at risk!

Once the wizarding world realized that their Seclusion was in real danger of being breached, it wouldn't have just been Britain who wanted to stop him, either.

It might also go some way toward why no one brings up Grindelwald when they are discussing Riddle. What Grindelwald was doing was almost the exact opposite to Voldemort's avowed party line. Where Riddle's activities, left unchecked, would simply make wizarding secrecy impossible to maintain, Grindelwald was actually sharing their secrets with Muggles.

Grindelwald probably wasn't the only wizard who thought that collaborating with the Nazis (and it sounds like it was only a fairly small, inner-circle segment of the Nazis who were the ones who were into the occult and trying to use it) was a good idea. But I very much doubt that all of the wizards even in areas where the Nazis were dominant agreed with him.

And I *certainly* don't think that their *Ministries* agreed with





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him. The Ministries of Magic, upon the whole, have way too much invested in the status quo of maintaining wizarding secrecy for that to be the case. So, in those areas there may have been something perilously close to a civil war in progress, which would have had their (wizarding) neighbors very worried and possibly had them mixing in, in an attempt to settle things down. Which may well have resulted in little echoes erupting all around the world in areas where wizarding seclusion was practiced.

And the uproar would have all been doubled in the off chance that a Ministry somewhere did break ranks and attempt to dissolve seclusion.

Which would land the whole thing onto the laps of the International Confederacy of Wizards (Or Warlocks. I don't remember just when the name was changed.) Albus may not have been Supreme Mugwump in those days, but it begins to look like he was a member (or representative to it) already, by 1940, because *that* body was probably the group which was begging him to do something about the problem.

Just because Rowling claims that it was global, and that it fed off of the Muggle war is no reason to automatically assume that it was a direct reflection of the Muggle war, after all. The same geographic areas of both Muggle and magical worlds may have both been in some form of uproar, but they were not necessarily fighting for the same thing, or over the same thing.



So where does that leave Albus, who supposedly defeated Grindelwald? After all, we know that Albus was still teaching

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daily classes in 1945. And V-E day was at the start of May, well before the summer term was finished.

Well, once again, let's consider those silly Nazis in 'Raiders', and reflect upon some possibilities.

Perhaps the mountain had come to Mohammed (or Burnham Wood to Dunsidaine) and Grindelwald was in Britain looking for one — or more — of the Hallows of Britain. (The title of Book 7 may have been announced by the time I spun out this theory. But there *is* actually such a thing as the 'Hallows of Britain' in folklore, so maybe not.)

Possibly Grindelwald was intending to destroy, or corrupt, or pervert them (as I believe Riddle did the fountain in the sea cave) in order to weaken the country — or, conversely, to steal them and haul them back to the Axis territories and use them against Britain.

Upon the whole, I really do like the idea that Grindelwald was sneaking around Britain looking for relics to corrupt. Maybe he was after something allegedly hidden at Hogwarts.

Let's face it, the scale of such an operation is a lot more compatible with what we'd seen of the ww than that of someone in jackboots gearing up to a Normandy-like invasion in reverse..

And frankly, the idea of Albus and Aberforth standing in for Tommy and Tuppence and acting out some variant on 'M or N?' sounds potentially like a *lot* more fun!



The thing that no one using the conventional line of reasoning regarding the Grindelwald threat seems to recall is that Famous Wizard Trading Cards are marketed to schoolchildren and make a point of emphasizing the sort of accomplishments



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that are considered by their publishers to be of greatest interest to persons who collect such cards.

In the main these persons are adolescents whose sense of what kind of events are truly important is still unsophisticated and pretty immature. To anyone over the age of about 16 the discovery of 12 different uses for dragon's blood is likely to look like it might be of vastly more sweeping significance to wizarding welfare than the defeat of what, in canon, was turning out to be one very obscure Dark wizard.

Particularly when Dumbledore seems to have averted a danger that no one was quite aware they were in. I'll bet Binns's class never makes it up to 1945, either. And I'll just bet that Bathilda didn't have a lot to say about her embarrassing great-nephew in the textbook that Binns's class uses. (ETA: suspicion confirmed. Hermione tells us that Bagshott's textbook doesn't get into the 20th century.)

Besides, we'd already been told exactly why Dumbledore was considered to be the greatest wizard in modern times before we ever saw that chocolate frog card, and those reasons weren't even on it. But since we didn't have the proper context at that point in the series to interpret it, the information blew right past us.

Canon Albus Dumbledore was never presented to us in a manner which was consistent with the interpretation of his "immortality" being dependent upon his role as a Great War Leader. And this is despite the fact that there was still a faction of the Wizengamot which had wanted to appoint him Minister for Magic as recently as 1990. For that matter, his association with what is possibly the most famous wizard of the Middle



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Ages, Nicholas Flamel, or his personal standing as a magical prodigy, which was evident by the time he sat his NEWTs, had probably been far more influential in the Wizengamot's decision-making than Grindelwald ever was. Albus came out and told us at the virtual King's Cross of Harry's vision that he'd been offered the post of Minister more than once even while Gellert was off building his empire. Griselda Marchbanks, for one, has no doubt been solidly in Albus's corner since around 1899. Indeed, solidly enough that it is evident that he had his own seat on the Wizengamot well before he was appointed Headmaster of Hogwarts. He outright tells Tom Riddle that he'd been offered the post of Minister for Magic three times before becoming Headmaster, and I seriously doubt that the Wizengamot has *ever* appointed a Minister who wasn't one of their own.

Dumbledore was manifestly not off leading teams of Aurors against Grindelwald in '45, or against Voldemort's supporters during the anything-up-to-a quarter-century duration of VoldWar I. Throughout the entire 20+ years of VoldWar I Dumbledore was quite clearly stated to have been solidly entrenched as the Headmaster of Hogwarts. A man of influence, certainly, an inspirational leader, probably, a statesman even, perhaps (hold that thought).

But not a General.

Not a "military" leader at all. For the third or fourth time, I repeat; the Wizarding World *has no standing armies*. They have an armed populace. Every qualified wizard or witch customarily goes about armed. It is not a military-based society. The only "peacekeepers" we have been told of in canon are the





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employees of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Magic. And Albus Dumbledore did not work for the DMLE, either.

Indeed, the manner in which Dumbledore was consistently presented to us within the series as it stood (at the end of Book 6, out of 7), placed him far more solidly among his world's "Great Thinkers" or possibly as one of its "Great Humanitarians". Someone whose reputation as being "considered by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times" could be "greatness" in the sense of a Winston Churchill possibly, but, failing that, is certainly more likely to be that of an Albert Einstein than of a Duke of Wellington.

And, as I state elsewhere; The information on that chocolate frog card is rather seriously off-kilter from general fanon perception. Albus Dumbledore's activities during VoldWar I, if any, are not even *mentioned* on it.



As I've also stated elsewhere, the purpose of training and employing Aurors is to find and catch renegade Dark wizards so the rest of the community doesn't have to. And yet, that is exactly what Dumbledore is reputedly "most famous" for.

This is a crock. By the time that card settled down to listing Dumbledore's accomplishments, the general narrative of the story had already told us everything we needed to know as to why so many people believed him to be the greatest wizard of modern times, and why there was a faction that continued to want to see him appointed as Minister for Magic. You can assure yourself that Dumbledore's fame did not rest upon his



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abilities as a defeater of Dark wizards.

It does not even rest upon his accomplishments as a great researcher and a Master Alchemist. Although they certainly contributed to it

Albus Dumbledore's fame was based upon a "cult of personality." One solidly, if covertly, grounded in the *political* arena.

Which adds a slight degree of nuance to the undercurrents of his long-standing conflict with the wizard formerly known as Tom Riddle.

By the time that card was issued Albus Dumbledore was, if not the greatest — which is at least arguable — he was certainly the most *politically* influential wizard in all great Britain. Despite his refusal to accept the post of Minister for Magic.

In his capacity as Headmaster, he works fairly closely with the Ministry of Magic. He does not work *for* the Ministry of Magic.

In fact, in his capacity of the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, the Ministry of Magic, if anything, works for him.

It is the Wizengamot that appoints the Minister for Magic. The Minister is not elected, he is appointed. By the Wizengamot. Any legislation that the Ministry of Magic proposes to impose upon its constituency can only do so with the Wizengamot's approval. And until the opening chapter of Order of the Phoenix, Albus Dumbledore was the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. Which explains exactly why Cornelius Fudge was sending weekly owls to the Headmaster over his first couple of years in office, and why Dumbledore was laying down the law as to what Fudge was supposed to do next about Voldemort's return at the end of Goblet of Fire. Dumbledore was effectively Fudge's boss.





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Nor does it end there; Until the opening of OotP, Dumbledore was also the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederacy of Wizards. At the very least this is the Wizengamot taken to the international level. It could, quite possibly, be something even more powerful yet. Now *that* office he could have owed to the Grindelwald defeat. But we will probably never be told one way or the other.

I was earlier inclined to think that perhaps Dumbledore is stated to be “most famous” for the defeat of Grindelwald, for no better reason than because it came as a surprise to everyone at the time, and it got written up in the DAILY PROPHET. And the reason the PROPHET almost certainly would have made a big deal of it, was specifically because of who Dumbledore already was, and, at that point in time, he was not an Auror. In 1945 he was a member of the Wizengamot — although probably not yet the Chief Warlock — a well-known schoolmaster (and probably Deputy Headmaster) and, consequently, a “local hero.”

In fact he must have been a *VERY well-known* schoolmaster, in order to have been offered, and to have refused, the office of Minister for Magic three times before his appointment as Headmaster at some point between 1957 and 1963.

I think we might want to dismiss the Grindelwald distraction from our reasoning altogether. We do not know how long a term that the MfM usually serves (the indications available by the time of the closing of canon suggested a term of approximately 10 years), but it could well boil down to; “as long as he or she wants to, or until he or she blots his or her copybook badly enough to be summarily removed.” Those three offers almost certainly did not all come between 1945 and 1960



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Which suggests that, contrary to my original suppositions, back during the 3-Year summer, Dumbledore probably already had a seat on the Wizengamot while he was no more than Deputy Headmaster, or even when he was still just serving as the Transfigurations Master at Hogwarts. Or — quite possibly — before he ever started teaching at all. Even though he probably wasn't yet Chief Warlock until some point after 1945.

Albus Dumbledore was certainly not an Auror at the time he defeated Grindelwald. We saw with our own eyes that as recently as June, 1943, Dumbledore was blamelessly teaching Transfiguration. Even if he had suddenly had a brainstorm to go off and train to be an Auror ten minutes later, three years of Auror training wouldn't have seen him qualify before 1946. And in any case we can conclude that he remained at Hogwarts at least until the end of June 1945, because the Chamber of Secrets remained closed throughout the remainder of Tom Riddle's period as a student there.

There is adequate canon support of this reading of events. We have the statement of the Diary Revenant himself that Riddle did not risk a reopening of the Chamber while he was still at school due to the oversight that Dumbledore kept on him.

(Although, since the memories that later informed the Diary Revenant were supposedly already in the book before Riddle's final year, and it consequently ought to have no authentic memory of that, we might safely dismiss that particular statement as either a lucky guess, or a memory of the 54-year-old soul fragment that had been added when the diary had been converted into a Horcrux. But Riddle evidently did *not* reopen the Chamber during his 6th or 7th year.)





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And yet, by the end of 1945, (and possibly before Tom even sat his NEWTs) Albus Dumbledore is suddenly “famous” for having defeated the Dark wizard Grindelwald. (During the Easter break?)

In fact according to my original theory, Tom Riddle may have had a ringside seat to Grindelwald’s defeat. He certainly doesn’t seem to be much deceived by Albus’s dotty old man act.



Well, like I say, I did have a theory about all that (“The Grindelwald Conspiracy”). I thought it was a very nice theory, too, and I was very pleased with it.

However, it was completely up-ended when we finally got the official Riddle backstory. So, while I was sorry to lose it, I’ve excised it here, since it was manifestly wrong. I’ve moved it into the ‘7th Son’ collection which is dedicated to the theories that didn’t make it past OotP (mostly), or HBP, and the reasoning behind where they came from. It may conceivably be of historical interest to somebody. Someday. Or entertainment, if not.

But, no, even after that one got shot down I *still* didn’t buy the “Dark Lord Grindelwald,” who appears in a fanfic near you. His existence clarified nothing of what we’ve been shown of the ww, in fact his existence as typically interpreted by the fandom directly contradicts what we had been shown. From the “meta” standpoint I was inclined to regard him as a “bright idea” left over from a very preliminary version of the earliest-developed outline of the series, much like the Granger sister or the Weasley cousin. Or even the very early version of PS/SS where James and Lily Potter had stolen the Philosopher’s Stone.

In short; a joke that Rowling turned out not to need, and



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could not use, and ultimately might have been better off never having brought it up in the first place. Leaving us with nothing more than a name on a chocolate frog card.

Although from her post-HBP interviews, it finally was beginning to look as if in the seventh book, she may at long last deliver the punchline. Or “a” punchline. We had no way of knowing whether what we finally got was the one she originally intended.



And in the event, it looks like Rowling finally found a piece of history that she *didn’t* play for laughs.

Not that I find the “serious” version any more convincing.

But, hey, we’re stuck with it, and it made a fine distraction. Which is all she needed it for, since realistically considered, there is no way that the business of Albus and Gellert and their misguided 2-month partnership some 99 years earlier had any direct impact upon the situation Harry was stuck having to deal with regarding Tom Riddle. All it did was to undermine his confidence in his “commanding officer.” Or to offer him a bogus alternate quest. And that certainly wasn’t going to keep Riddle from coming after him.

But all the resultant navel-gazing helped to string out the endless camping trip from Hell until Rowling could, at long last, get little Teddy Lupin born, so she could finally buckle down and finish off the story.



Given the demands of the academic year, it now looks as if





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Albus probably couldn't actually step forward and oblige the ICW by dueling Grindelwald until at least a term break.

This is further suggested by the impression we had deliberately been fed over the whole series that the whole outcome of this alleged Grindelwald war was finally decided by a single one-on-one duel between the two wizards.

Excuse me; I know that I have been harping on the same string about the ww having no standing armies for a long time, but wouldn't you expect a reigning, or rising, Dark Lord wannabe to at least have some *supporters*?

Particularly if he is successful enough to be building prisons to hold his enemies. What was he doing? Going out and kidnapping them, and locking them up all by himself? He isn't supposed to have taken over most of Eastern Europe *single-handedly* is he? Riddle at least had his dirty five dozen or so.

So I really did have to ask; had Grindelwald's movement already been defeated, and Grindelwald himself simply would not agree to give himself up?

The ICW begged Albus for five years to come and take out one wizard? That much is at least marginally more like being in scale. But why did it have to be Albus?

Did *Gellert* demand that it be Albus?

And Albus wouldn't take on the job until he was shamed into it? Is Rowling *serious*?



But in any event; Harry, with his mystical magical window into Riddle's mind leapt to the conclusion, very near to the end of the adventure, that as soon as Riddle was out of school he



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was off like a shot to Albania to recover the Ravenclaw diadem — not, mind you that Harry's mystical magical window into Riddle's mind could be bothered to have told him that the mystery Horcrux was the Ravenclaw diadem, or what it looked like, or where Riddle'd hidden it (other than "at Hogwarts") until after the fact, mind you. Evidently Harry's mystical magical window into Riddle's mind could only be depended upon to show him things that were basically irrelevant to the problem, or to show him things at points where it was impossible for him to do anything about them. (Was the whole "vision thing" being orchestrated by the prophecy demons? It certainly acted like it.)

But in any case; if Harry is right (and I'm certainly not convinced of that), Riddle was off to Albania in the summer of '45.

Which, since we know he was employed at B&B for at least a couple of years after finishing Hogwarts is totally bogus.



And, I think I did mention a *potential* Riddle connection to Grindelwald didn't I? Not a very direct one, I'm afraid.

Well it's not. It's just really not.

But we don't know for certain that Grindelwald was defeated during Easter break. Maybe it was during *summer* break. Maybe *late* in summer break. Maybe when Tom got to Albania, Grindelwald maybe hadn't even "officially" been defeated yet. That could have happened while Riddle was over there.

I don't really think that *everyone* Riddle met would have been overjoyed by the fact. I mean, we know the types of wizards Tom hung out with.

Even if Riddle didn't hit town until after killing Hepzibah





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Smith a year or three out of school, I doubt this particular demographic would have been altogether resigned to the loss of the “Dark Lord Grindelwald”.

I think we don’t need to look very far to figure out where he spent at least some of the time he spent out of England after murdering Hepzibah Smith and absconding with her relics.

If Harry is to be believed (and I flatly don’t believe him) then Tom didn’t spend any more time in Albania than he could get away with on his first visit (assuming there actually was a first visit), before returning and charming his way into Borgin & Burkes. In fact, he spent so little time there that most people aren’t even aware he went.

And I don’t buy that line of reasoning at all. I don’t think Tom went to Albania until it seemed a good idea for him to get out of Britain. Chiefly because Albus Dumbledore was suddenly agitating for Morfin Gaunt’s release from Azkaban.

That alone would have sent up a warning flag that his modification of Morfin’s memory had probably gone awry.

But Tom was certainly in Albania within a handful or so years out of Hogwarts, and he knew that he would find any number of pissed-off and dissatisfied wizards there who might be looking for a charismatic leader.



## Aberforth (& the Goat)

Well this one is counter-indicated, but it’s far enough off-canon — or book canon, in any case — that it never got completely contradicted. A bit of refurbishment and it’s still in play. Since it was mainly for laughs in the first place, that’s heartening.

Although, it should be noted that this takes absolutely no account of the films featuring Grindelwald vs. Newt Scamander & Co. which are now taking place off in the background. This whole collection of theories has never taken account of any film versions of anything.

To my way of thinking, film is effectively authorized fanfic. It is not, and by its nature will never be the result of a “single vision” by any single author. Even if the original author does involve themselves in it, it’s never going to be entirely theirs.



So, to recap: in the interview given at the Edinburgh Festival in August of 2004 JK Rowling confirmed the fans’ suspected Aberforth sighting in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. The surly barman of the disreputable Hog’s Head Pub in Hogsmead is indeed Aberforth Dumbledore.

Or is he?

Well, yes. He is. From the transcript of the Edinburgh interview, as posted on JK Rowling’s official website, the actual exchange went as follows:

*Q: Why is the barman of the Hog’s Head vaguely familiar to Harry? Is he Dumbledore’s brother?*

*A: Ooh — you are getting good. Why do you think that it is Aberforth? [Audience member: Various clues. He*





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*smells like goats and he looks a bit like Dumbledore]. I was quite proud of that clue. That is all that I am going to say. [Laughter]. Well, yes, obviously. I like the goat clue — I sniggered to myself about that one.*

Frankly, after all of that coyness, I'd be tempted to wonder whether there actually even was an Aberforth Dumbledore. Or whether his existence might be a complete fabrication that happens to serve Albus's purposes. If it weren't for that vintage photo of the original Order of the Phoenix, which showed both of them at the same gathering, I'd be asking whether anyone had ever seen the two Dumbledore brothers together.

Be that as it may: it is obvious that if we can trust this particular bit of information, Rowling has emptied a whole new can of worms across the game board for the fan theorists to have to get hold of, sort out, and tot up an accounting for.



First, is Aberforth merely "the barman" of the Hog's Head or does he actually own the place? And if he isn't the owner, who is? And if he is the owner, for how long has he owned it? And why isn't he *stated* as being the owner, by name, the way Rosemerta is at the Three Broomsticks? Is Aberforth, "the barman," supposedly "standing in" for an absent owner? A perennially absent owner?

For that matter, is the Hog's Head the Dumbledores' long-standing family business? (ETA: this at least seems highly unlikely. Kendra Dumbledore removed her young family to Godric's Hollow after the scandal of her husband's arrest, and seems not to have run any kind of business.) And, considering



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the general caliber of the Hog's Head's clientele, is it generally known that the barman is the Headmaster's brother? And if it isn't known, why isn't it known? Is Aberforth actually undercover at the Hog's Head and going by a different name?

This general knowledge, at least, seems fairly unlikely. At first glance, one would hardly expect QuirrellMort to have deliberately chosen the Hog's Head as the venue in which to pry information out of Hagrid with the promise of a dragon's egg right under the Headmaster's brother's nose if he had known about the connection. (I've always suspected that Dumbledore knew about that egg. Now I'm even more convinced that the whole setup in PS/SS was elaborately rigged. Hagrid was *supposed* to pass Quirrell that information.)

Of course, QuirrellMort may not have had that much of a choice in venue. If he was wanting to deal with Hagrid, he was pretty much forced to go where Hagrid was known to be found.

We do know that 'Forth has been stationed there for a considerable length of time, Mundungus Fletcher got himself thrown out of the place by Aberforth some 20 years ago (i.e., while the Marauders were in school, during VoldWar I), and still hasn't managed to get himself allowed back in.

For that matter Albus Dumbledore's comment to Tom in HBP as to being not omniscient but merely friendly with the local barmen, could have been made as far back as 1957 (or as recently as, say, 1962), which strongly implies that Aberforth was already in place as far back as Albus's appointment as Headmaster. That's a long time to be camped on your own brother's doorstep without it being general knowledge. Or is it general knowledge, and it's just that nobody cares?





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So, who ran the place before that?  
For that matter, just who ran the place in 1945?



However, Rowling finally gave us the official Grindelwald backstory. And as usual for most of the threads introduced in the final three books, the final payoff wasn't nearly as clever, or as well put together as some of the fan theories that preceded it. In particular we have very little solid information on just how this alleged final showdown between Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald was handled.

As well as just when in 1945 it is supposed to have taken place.

Did it take place right at the end of the Muggle war? Before it? After it?

Was there even a Muggle war that they had to fit this wizarding war in around the edges of?

How did this fit in with the school year? Albus was still actively teaching classes in 1945. He wasn't the Headmaster and able to slip away for a few days without disrupting everyone's schedule, yet.

And once this duel had taken place the whole thing was suddenly over?

Poof! Just like that a whole wizarding war is over?

An allegedly *global* war is suddenly over?

And just how, precisely, does a wizarding war which included such actions on the scope of building a whole new prison for the leader's enemies manage to take place completely off the Muggle radar. Particularly since, if it had to wait for Albus to be free for the summer break it must have gone on for some



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months after V-E day. It begins to sound very much as though our Gellert slowly realized that he had painted himself into a corner, and that facing Albus Dumbledore and getting clapped up in his own prison was the best of his options.

Despite Rowling's statement in 2005 that she "feels" that the ww echoes the Muggle one, and that there was a global wizarding war in progress that fed off the Muggle one — although how she thinks the totally inadequate population she says the wizarding world claims would manage to conduct such a war is unexplained — the various national Ministries of Magic still maintain no standing armies, after all.

From what we've seen of the modern Ministry of Magic, East European wizards, upon the whole, were unlikely to be any more concerned with the ambitions of Adolf Hitler and his handlers than British wizards were concerned with those of Neville Chamberlain. Or those of any King, Queen or Prime Minister at any point since the establishment of Wizarding Seclusion. At least not unless those ambitions were a direct threat to them.

Frankly, by this time Rowling's "feelings" are sounding as likely as the *unprompted* visions of Sybil Trelawney's "inner eye."

However, there has probably been a never-ending magical equivalent of *gang* wars in the wizarding world. Voldemort's activities being a case in point. Grindelwald's may well have been just such another. If that prison was in a sufficiently remote spot, its construction could *possibly* have taken place off the Muggle radar.

In the original seven books, however, we have no solid indication that Grindelwald operated in the same style as Tom. And indeed Rowling implied not. Plus, a gang war is hardly "global!"





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For all that Rowling claims that Grindelwald really was mixed up in whatever the wizards of Europe were brangling over at the same time that their Muggle compatriots were allegedly engaged in WWII — whatever it might have been — she hasn't yet offered any plausible candidates for what it was. And outside of films, isn't really likely to.

But then plausibility under closer examination is not one of Rowling's strong points, is it?



So. Did the Hog's Head discretely pass into the Dumbledore brothers' hands sometime after the end of WWII — off the public record — and they deliberately chose to leave the "ambiance" as is, and use it as a resource to keep an eye on the kind of people who had formerly made it their "base"? Or did Aberforth simply buy (or inherit) it as some point and the ambiance is just a case of water seeking its own level?

Was Aberforth in place at the Hog's Head, as an employee, even before Albus started at Hogwarts as an instructor? From Albus's jokes at his brother's expense it doesn't sound like Aberforth stayed in school to sit his NEWTs. Nor does it sound like he would have had any wish to live in the same household as Albus after their sister died, either. He could have settled in Hogsmeade taking care of livestock and doing odd jobs after sitting his OWLs in 1900, the year after Ariana's death, and never went back to Godric's Hollow ever again.

And then there is the question of the Hog's Head's clientele.

In order for the place to still attract the sort of dodgy customers who clearly frequent it, one assumes that if Aberforth is

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known to be Dumbledore's brother, their very public falling-out (back in the 19th century) must also still be known by someone. Otherwise you could hardly imagine the likes of Willy Widdershins making it a favored hangout. To say nothing of Tom Riddle and his crowd, back in the day. Or for QuirrellMort to be making use of it in '91-'92.

And yet, Aberforth is, or was, a Member of the Order of the Phoenix.

Which, perhaps, could explain why Mad-Eye Moody claims to have only met him the once. Aurors are clearly not welcome, in the general run of things, at the Hog's Head.



Upon the whole, I think that the relationship between the two brothers was known. As was their long ago falling out. In point of fact, I suspect that there was not even a ghost of a chance of that falling out being even slightly eased until *after* Albus had deat with Gellert in '45. Aberforth has a long memory, and I don't think his nature is particularly forgiving. In the public eye, Albus simply dropped in once and a while for a drink — or, as he says, he appeared to.

Which raises the nagging question of why Quirrell chose it as a meeting place. By most accounts, Professor Quirrell himself was a reasonably virtuous young man — before he was gotten at and taken over by Voldemort — and the Hog's Head's unsavory reputation is hardly a recent development. Not to mention that he is generally agreed to have been a teacher at Hogwarts *before* his fatal sabbatical. Did he set that meeting up strictly because Hagrid was known to hang out there periodically (in



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some capacity of messenger between the Dumbledore brothers?), or because of the fact that it is the most dodgy location he knew about without ever having really been there, beyond poking his nose in to see what it was like? Ultimately choosing that for his meeting place simply because he could conduct the meeting in disguise there, without comment?

And rather more importantly, the fact that Voldemort *didn't* warn Quirrell off from using the Hog's Head for this purpose strongly suggests that he still either doesn't know that the barman is Dumbledore's brother, or believes them to still be at loggerheads. Which, if Aberforth took up that post after Tom finished school in '45 and skipped off to London, or after he dropped out of sight around '47-'50, and before "Lord Voldemort" surfaced some ten years later might make sense.

Conversely, if Aberforth has been a fixture in Hogsmead since around 1900, well before Albus ever took up a teaching post, The villagers might know of the relationship, but it is such old news that no one thinks to mention it. In which case, I suspect that the Hog's Head could have been an invaluable source of useful information all through VoldWar I.

Or before. If Albus Dumbledore had already refused the position of Minister for Magic three times before finally being offered the post he really wanted, then he was probably a member in good standing of the Wizengamot for decades before that business with Grindelwald. And Albus is the kind of politico who wants to keep an eye on his constituency. *All* of his constituency. Particularly the dodgy element. Even if he doesn't intend to do anything about them.

Ergo; the simplest line to draw, is to conclude that Aberforth

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has been off-and-on serving as his brother's agent since at least the beginning of "Lord Voldemort's" first rise, if not longer. He has very probably conducted himself in a manner which would either allay any suspicion that he is related to the Headmaster at all, or to cause any of his target customer base that has a clue to suppose that he adamantly opposes his bother and all his works. And indeed, what he actually has to say about his brother is both highly uncomplimentary and pretty clearly his truthful opinion, and no kind of an act at all.

But I suspect that he may have privately reported back to Albus at least some of what he overhears. Sometimes through Hagrid, who has also been in the area, year round, and not confined to the school property, ever since 1943 (and was of age by wizarding standards by 1946). Hagrid apparently makes a regular look-in at the place, and his presence there arouses no suspicions.

(I always did suspect that one of those four "secret" tunnels on the Marauder's map that the Weasleys avoided because Filch already knows about them could have ended up at the Hog's Head. It now seems that wasn't quite the case — although we can't know for certain. But the entry from the Room of Requirement, pretty clearly bypassed whatever alternate access Filch might have known about.)

One also wondered whether we would ever get an answer to what was going on with the goat.

One of my fellow regulars on a discussion board once posted a rather fun piece of information from folklore.



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It seems that the Norse god Odin had a goat.

I already knew that the Norse god Thor had a chariot that was drawn by goats. Also that whenever he and his companions got stranded, they would butcher, roast, and eat one of them, and bring it back to life the next day, and travel on. But Odin's goat served a different purpose.

It gave mead instead of milk.

Now, that certainly sounds like an inappropriate charm, doesn't it?

But one that you might expect from a bartender.

And there is no question but that Rowling has an extensive knowledge of folklore.

Still, the truth is more likely to turn out to be something rather more pedestrian; possibly on the order of old 'Forth doing a brisk little side business (on the black market or otherwise) producing and selling bezoars.

Never the less, I remain rather fond of the following explanation. It's been posted here since the original version of the collection went up in 2003, and is probably completely wrong. But I still like it. And it's not like we will ever probably learn the truth of the matter...



The rest of this actually qualifies as fiction, although it is closer to being a drabble than a story.

Its antecedents are impeccable, being based upon an observation by no less than the "big-name-Fan"/author known as Textualsphinx.

The way it came about was; an online discussion was under-



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way in the old Café Dangereux (now long departed), soon after the release of Phoenix, regarding the suspected Aberforth sighting, (primarily thanks to the Hog's Head's pervading smell of goats, but it must be recalled that Harry also thought that the barman himself looked vaguely familiar). In the course of this, Textualsphinx commented:

*"All this stuff on goats reminds me of the Chagall exhibition I went to this summer with my sister. It was only by seeing so many of the paintings all at once that the guy's obsession with them became apparent. We ended up approaching each room muttering "Cherchez la chèvre," and we always found one hanging around somewhere. Usually the sky. (Musta bin an inappropriate charm...)"*

Upon which I was bitten by the "silly bug"



We all know that the Potterverse is not really our world, but there are so many similarities.

It also seems apparent that as many of our Muggle notables would have had counterparts in the Potterverse as the fact that many of the legendary wizards from our folklore were, in that universe, real people.

There is no reason why Marc Chagall might not have been one of the Muggle notables with a Potterverse counterpart.

Young Marc Chagall, in our world at least, was Russian-born, and made two distinctly separate pilgrimages to Paris. The first, as a very young man, in 1910 found him settled in the same district on the Left Bank as a number of other notable names from the Post-Impressionist period, among them being Modigliani,





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he of the painting of a nude on a cushion.

Chagall, most unfortunately, made an ill-timed visit home to Russia in 1914, found himself conscripted into the first World War, and did not return to Paris until the 1920s, by which time he was already drawing goats.

And so it goes. Herein follows the tale of:

### Aberforth Dumbledore and the Goat

**T**he City of Paris occupies a low-lying river valley. And, in the manner of other great Cities similarly situated, along the Thames, the Hudson, the Potomac, and others too numerous to mention, it has all the potential of becoming utterly, unremittingly, humidly miserable during the months of high summer. Traditionally, any of the citizens of such cities with the means and the resources necessary, would retire to their country estates during this period to avoid unhealthy “miasma’s,” and the epidemic diseases said to be spread by them, only returning to the Metropolis with the advent of cooler weather in the Autumn.

In the days before widespread air conditioning, those without such properties might still desperately scrape the money together to rent a country cottage and try to manage to retreat from summer in the City for at least a few weeks. In the case of the “bohemian” poor, several individuals or couples might pool their resources in order to do so, citing the opportunity to engage in plein air painting as a justification — although the various Post-Impressionist art movements were far less dependent upon this technique than the Impressionists had been.

We may conclude that the very young Marc Chagall was among one of those composite bohemian households in

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the summer of 1911, for that was the year that Aberforth Dumbledore was holidaying in France.

Goats have a reputation for being highly eccentric animals, given to odd starts and bizarre — which is to say, “capricious” behavior. Aberforth Dumbledore approves of goats — which he regards in the light of his “totem animal.” Were he a Muggle in the late 20th century, his home would no doubt be cluttered with goat figurines and goat-referencing slogans on refrigerator magnets, or T-shirts, and whenever any of his drinking buddies (or, more typically, their lady friends) came across a new piece of goat-themed clutter they would think no further about what to do about ‘Forth’s next birthday or Whatsmas present.

In any event, in the summer of 1911 Aberforth Dumbledore was holidaying in the south of France in a lovely pastoral area, taking his ease and admiring the scenery. As were the usual compliment of plein air painters and their friends, hangers-on, and what not, young Marc Chagall among them. Although he and Aberforth probably did not ever actually meet.

One morning toward the end of his stay, Aberforth was strolling along a country lane and passed an orchard where a number of goats were grazing under the trees, feasting on windfall fruit. As always, when encountering goats — which are all somewhat mad, one of the reasons ‘Forth so enjoys watching them — Aberforth stopped for a while to observe, and see whether any of them were exercising their goat-given gift for eccentric behavior.

And, indeed, one of them was. One of the goats had evidently decided that the windfall fruit wasn’t good enough for it and had reared up on its hind legs with its forelegs braced



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against the tree trunk and was straining to get at the fruit still on the tree. This tickled 'Forth's sense of humor and he cast a hover charm on the goat, who — taking this perfectly in stride — immediately “walked” up the tree trunk and started gorging itself on the fruit still ripening on the tree.

'Forth hung around for a while watching the goat leap from tree to tree sampling the crop. Soon enough, however, this reminded him that he was getting hungry himself, so he wandered off for lunch. He no doubt intended to come back later and dispel the charm, but he got into a quarrel with the waiter, stormed off fuming, and it completely slipped his mind. It was several days before a rumor of the “flying goat” made its way back to the French Ministry of Magic.

By that time 'Forth had ended his holiday and was back in Britain, which snowballed his lapse into an “International Incident” once the French Ministry finally traced him, and demanded that the British Ministry “do something” about it. Under such circumstances, the British Ministry couldn't very well dodge their responsibility, and issued a very stern public reprimand, as well as a fine, and the affair got into the PROPHEET and was very embarrassing for the more conventional of Aberforth's acquaintance, and the people who knew him socially. Although, evidently, not well enough to simply regard the whole incident as being “typical Aberforth” and to dismiss it.

Aberforth, who has never had any time for the PROPHEET, paid the fine and ignored the whole thing.

The French Ministry, did a very good job of tracking down the Muggles who were suspected of having seen the flying

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goat. But they missed a few, since many of the artists and their friends had returned to Paris by then, and their households had been so haphazard that it would have been next to impossible to determine just who those households had been composed of at any given time of with any sort of accuracy.

Although it is altogether possible that the Ministry *did* actually catch up to Chagall and his friends. Magical technology is every bit as much of an ongoing process as any other variety; the form of Obliviate which was generally in use on the Continent in 1911 had the drawback of exhibiting a pronounced tendency to allow the information so suppressed to break through in dreams.





## Living Waters

This is in the way of a gift to one of my fellow travelers, the LiveJournalist known as Swythyv. It spun off from a 4-way e-mail discussion.

Rather a lot of this essay is duplicated in the 2nd of the 'Exeunt Albus' pair of essays, but that article was largely in an attempt to delineate what possibilities could have been at work regarding the actions taken in HBP. This one is primarily a springboard for a possible crackfic prompt.

Regulus = Crookshanks the cat Animagus is one of Swythyv's pet theories, in the face of all opposition, including Rowling's.



Oh, snap. I think I've got it.

By which I mean I think I know why Albus dragged Harry to the cave and ordered him to force him to drink the potion.

The potion induces Remorse. That is its *purpose*. And it isn't lethal unless your soul is so compromised that you are likely to die of the pain of the remorse generated.

True, Albus knew that he needed to get Harry out of the castle if Draco was bringing in an invasion force. The last thing he wanted to do was to leave Harry in a position to mess with it.

And, yes, he had discovered that this was probably one of Tom's Horcrux hideaways, and he legitimately wanted to get one more of them settled before his time ran completely out.

But he *knew* that his time was almost out and he didn't have an easy conscience — even if he had already used the Resurrection Stone to apologize to his sister. He probably wanted to repair whatever damage his soul had taken in a lifetime of



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misjudgments and bad decisions before he made Snape kill him.

Albus did have full access to all those Dark Arts books concerning the use and abuse of souls, and he knew how it worked. And I still say that that cave was far older than Tom Riddle.

I rather think that if Tom had been normal, and not completely power-mad, he might have made a very decent historian. He seems to have been fascinated by legends, and wonders, (and prophecies). And if I am wrong and he *did* create that cave, he certainly was working from some extremely traditional templates.

But I don't think Tom made that cave. I think he and the two younger children from the orphanage got into the antechamber when Tom was 9 or 10 and he had a highly successful afternoon terrorizing them there. (Perhaps immobilizing them with the tide coming in, and leaving them there, until their panic managed to override his control — and then making it impossible for them to speak of it afterwards when he saw they had escaped, is my guess.)

But Tom likes to revisit the scenes of his triumphs, and he takes possession of such places if he can. When he eventually got back to the cave, after he'd had at least some magical training, he was able to recognize that the place had "known magic."

I don't know whether that visit was as an adult, or if the orphanage made another trip there during his school years (which, when you stop to think of it seems very likely). But 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 various forms of Dark magic that Tom researched. I expect that our Tom spent a lot





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of time in the Hogwarts library. I'll bet he staked out a corner of it as his own little domain and held court there under the staff's noses.

But we're still left with all sorts of unanswered questions about that cave. Harry saw the body of one wizard in that lake, his robes trailing in the water. That is probably supposed to be understood to be Regulus Black (given how simplistic most of Rowling's answers to the apparent mysteries strewn through the series have 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 actually attacked Harry were 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 nearly 20 years, even if there are no fish in that lake feeding on it.

And we have another puzzle as to who (or what) refilled the basin after Regulus drank it to switch the lockets. It is possible that Reggie simply used the spell Harry used to keep refiling Slughorn's bottles when he got Sluggy and Hagrid drunk, and extended the residue of the potion once he lowered the level enough for Kreachur to get the Locket out, but Kreachur didn't stay to see him do it, and Tom doesn't seem to have gone back himself until just before the final battle. (At which point the basin was again full, despite Albus and Harry's having emptied it only the year before.)

But if its purpose is to induce remorse, I don't think the potion is lethal in itself, however painful. However, it also induces a great thirst, and if you touch the lake, the Inferi are programmed to drag you under and drown you (\*cough\* Have we or have we

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not ever encountered something referred to as a "Bubble-head Charm"? That charm had been very popular at Hogwarts during at least a part of Harry's 5th year). By all rights, Reggie could as easily 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 year as a DE).

And as just mentioned above, we have canonical evidence that the basin does refill of itself. When Tom went to check on his Horcrux, he turned the potion clear to see into it. i.e., there was potion in the basin. Albus and Harry certainly never stopped to refill it, but in the year since they had been there it had refilled itself.

Acto Kreachur, Tom filled the basin with potion after Kreachur had drunk it, but we were not told whether he had already put the potion that Kreachur drank into the basin in the first place. It now sounds very much as though the potion was already there. Tom may even have sampled it and, being Tom, reacted very badly to it, concluding that it must be a particularly lethal poison.

And Kreachur also does not say whether Tom brought additional potion to the cave to refill the basin after he drank it, or simply used the refill spell on the residue. I suspect the later. If so, the spell still seems to be holding.



Which raises the considerable question of what the cave's purpose originally was.

If the cave and what is in it are as old as they seem to be I'd



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be surprised if there isn't a story related to it in Beedle the Bard' collected works. Or that of one of his competitors. But Beedle seems to be the major name in indigenous British wizarding fables. And Albus was raised as a young British wizard who was probably familiar with the full collection from boyhood.

Which makes the fact that the book *Hermione* was left in his will is printed in "runes" very curious. We know that Rowling is absolute pants at anything to do with history, but runes are more Germanic or Scandinavian than they are British. (Unless she *said* runes, and *meant* ogham, which I am pretty sure are either Pictish or Celtic.) Which suggests to me that that may be an original copy or at least one that was transcribed rather than printed — which would put it pre-15th century at least — rather than the version that most wizards over the last couple of hundred years are familiar with.

Although it is also a valid point, and a perfectly viable alternative reading, that much of the specific "wizarding" culture to which we have been introduced is a Post-Seclusion retrofit, and that printing books in runes might be akin to the archaic adoption of robes as everyday dress. The robes appear to have been widely accepted. But the adoption of runes does not appear to have stuck.

But the very fact that Ron is familiar with Beedle argues against its ever being out of print, any more than Mother Goose has been (one now realizes where the twins probably heard about making unbreakable vows, even though Rowling's version of Beedle doesn't go there) even though the later editions have been published in English, rather than "Beedle's" runes.

Which would identify Beedle as either a wizarding folklorist



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collecting traditional tales around the turn of the 18th century, or the eponymous author of the tales collected by an unnamed wizard who published the original anthology. But household tales tend to morph over the centuries in the telling. The version Ron knows has clearly shifted slightly from the one Hermione was given.

ETA: Rowling set Beedle in something like 13th century. Fine. Nothing much depends on that.

However, if Rowling really *does* mean runes, and the runes are *original*, the stories could date from Saxon times, i.e., around the time that Hogwarts was founded. The Peverills (or a descendant) and a Slytherin descendant eventually married, but it may have taken centuries before they did so. Swythv has pointed out that it was around the 12th–13th century that most of the transition of scrolls, to codexes, to books was made. By then both families might have changed names.

I have to admit that the Peverill grave at Godric's Hollow sounds a lot more recent than the 10th century, even if the Church may be a rebuilt one on the site of one that was much older, and the churchyard older yet. The 13th century does at least sound marginally possible.

Which now has one wondering why Victor Krum recognized the sigil as Grindelwald's mark but *not* as that of the Deathly Hallows. But I think we have a reasonable explanation for that at hand. Grindelwald had a British great-aunt (or a great-aunt living in Britain, anyway) who could have sent him a book of British fables when he was a small child.

Yet Hermione was certain that the Hallows sigil had been *added* to the book, and wasn't a part of it, nor did the (original)





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story of the 3 brothers who tried to cheat Death ever refer to the “gifts” as the Deathly Hallows. (Nor is there any sacred connotation associated with them which would justify their being referred to as “hallows” at all.) And the book is supposedly written in runes which are Germanic or Scandinavian.

I really think that this whole scenario simply fails to add up, so perhaps we need to look for a missing element.



Clearly there is a semi-secret wizarding cult which has sprung up and adopted that particular story, devised or adopted that particular symbol — which really *is* cut into Ignotas Peverill’s headstone — and probably some kind of woo-woo philosophy to go with their interpretation of it. Xeno Lovegood as much as tells us so. Grindelwald may even have encountered members of that society rather than necessarily the nursery tale, and learned of it 3rd-hand, although he seems to have done so before he was 16 and was expelled from Durmstrang, since he carved the sigil into the wall there before they threw him out. He seems to have found the business all rather laughable although he and Albus were still young enough to play a fine, protracted game of “what if” on the strength of it.

We can’t be sure just how lightly Albus took it, however. Albus was a far less carefree young man than Gellert was.

Indeed, I’m not altogether sure how seriously Gellert took it — until he actually had the Elder wand in his own hands.

I’m not at all convinced that Albus could, or would have tried to suppress the information in Beedle, though. It isn’t dangerous on the same level that information about various Dark Arts

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may be. You also have to wonder just when he woke up to the fact that the unhallowed Hallows were all real. He certainly still pooh-poohs the notion that they were given to the brothers by Death himself.

He knew about the Elder Wand being legendary, certainly, and *possibly* real, although he may not have initially believed that the one he got from Grindelwald was the same one as in that particular story. (The story in its original form certainly doesn’t say anything about the wand having gone on to be a famous legend.) But if he believed that the Peverill ring really included the Resurrection stone, you have to wonder why it took him so long to start trying to find out what Riddle did with it. The Bob Ogden memory dated from around 1925. And even if he never got a lead on the ring until he spoke to Morfin Gaunt in Azkaban he must have known about it by the time Tom returned to the ww some point around 1960.

Although the easiest explanation to apply there, is just that Albus assumed that the Gaunts’ ring was an artifact of the secret society, on the same order as Xeno Lovegood’s broach, and consequently, meaningless in itself.

Given that everyone in this story is turning out to be a lot dumber than we originally gave them credit for, he may not have put 2+2 together until he got a look at James’s cloak. And that may not have been until some time in the ’70s. If not later.



But, that cave; you really have to wonder now whether the symbol of the Deathly Hallows is carved anywhere in that cave. It’s not like Harry or Albus would have noticed, is it? It was way



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too dark in there.

And also, I'd say the cave is much older than the 12th–13th century. I could *easily* believe the sigil is carved on the archway in the DoM (which is described as a pointed, gothic arch), but not necessarily there in the cave.

And Albus told Harry not to touch the lake. Since he had figured that would alert the Inferi to come and drag you under.

But we might need to consider that although Kreachur says he *drank* from the lake, and he recovered, Albus didn't.

Harry splashed Albus with water from the lake, but he didn't drink it and I suspect that you are supposed to. The water will facilitate in the healing and purification, and I think Swythiv was right to identify the Lake as "living" water. The touch of the water revives, but it does not heal. And it probably preserves what is put into it, although it cannot return life to the dead.

That island now sounds an awful lot like the last stop before the God-King goes out to meet his destiny, or the place of an anointed Champion's vigil before his ordeal.

Such a candidate probably would not be required to drain the whole basin, but he had to drink from it and see the results of his past actions. And then to drink from the living water of the Lake to heal and purify himself for his task.

For that matter, I have a problem with Albus's pronouncement that the basin can only be emptied by drinking the stuff. If you can scoop it up with a crystal goblet You ought to be able to scoop it up with 12 crystal goblets. And maybe back in the day a council of 12 elders gathered there to do so at the end of the old year. But, still, that particular issue really has only become a problem since Tom stocked the Lake with Inferi, preventing



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anyone from drinking from it.

If there were no Inferi in that lake there would be no bar to drinking the water, and no limit to the number of persons who went to the island. Only the size of the boat would limit that. And we were directly told that it was Tom who introduced the "toy boat". (Which in itself is a bit curious given that we were shown that Tom can *fly*.)

Twelve elders with 12 goblets at one particular point of the year...? The basin does refill on its own. In just about a year's time, too.



I still think that Albus's major nudge to finding the cave was a re-examination of the memory of his interview with Mrs Cole. But if he had managed to glimpse anything of the first cave expedition, with Tom, from Kreachur that might have set him off to wondering when it was that someone else had mentioned a cave to him, related to Tom Riddle.

And the Inferi certainly were not a part of that cave before Tom messed with it. Those Inferi were deployed by Tom in the last war. But I will bet that they never were seen after the 1980 date of Reggie's death. Once they were in the cave, Tom left them there to guard his Horcrux. He never brought them online this time round.

And I think I was wrong in my original theory. His followers did *not* know about that cave. I don't think he ever wanted *any* of them to know about that cave.

But I'm not convinced that the living water will put you into suspended animation. That does not really fit anything we've





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got in canon. It also isn't the Draft of Living Death. (Which turns out to have never really figured in the series at all, it was merely set-dressing.) And the Black family tapestry *did* generate a death date for Reggie.



However. I'll give you a present Swythyv: Harry didn't stay dead when Voldemort killed him. Possibly because Tom had not only inadvertently made Harry into a Horcrux, but by using Harry's blood to build a simulacrum, he had made *himself* into one as well — *for* Harry. So we do have a Potterverse precedent of people who don't stay dead. Even if it is Harry, and Harry as we all know is "special."

But then, it is also a very "traditional" understanding in general that witches cannot drown. The water will not accept them, so they float. Presumably this principle should work for wizards as well. Consequently, the corpse of the wizard that Harry saw floating in the lake, would have had to have gone into the water as a corpse. It may just be one of the Inferi.

(Even though Rowling clearly *wants* us to think that that corpse is Reggie.)

The Inferi dragged Reggie under, and he blacked out, and the Tapestry recorded his death. But he would have popped back up to the surface as soon as the Inferi turned loose of him, which they would have done as soon as he stopped struggling. If he had the good fortune to pop up, face up, near the shore, he might have revived and managed to scramble out. He had also probably swallowed some of the water from the lake during the struggle, after all.



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No one was told they were supposed to come and fish Reggie out. He didn't ever expect to go home. He knew that would only bring danger down on his mother if he did. And he didn't dare call Kreachur to come and get him. He, like Harry, had expected to die, and, like Harry, he hadn't. His temporary death may have broken Voldemort's connection to his Dark Mark as well, although it might still be visible. It also generated a death date on the family tapestry. But the tapestry's enchantments probably weren't designed to self-correct if he revived.

That was the year that Harry was born. Voldemort wasn't defeated until the following year. Now that Rowling has failed to convince all of us of her version, we are free to develop our own. Maybe Reggie *had* learned to become an Animagus. Shapeshifting does run in his family, after all. Maybe he traced his brother — who he knew opposed Lord Voldemort — and lurked about until he figured out that James and Lily were significant for some reason. He may have gone on to be the Potters' cat, and after they were killed, he probably learned that the reason they were significant was because of Harry. It would have taken him quite a while to trace Harry, and once he did he may have freeloaded with Mrs Figg, who he might have known something of from spying on the Order over the last year of the war, and knew that she had a soft touch for moggies. He'd have learned to recognize Harry, and probably kept an eye on him.

When Harry stormed out of the Dursleys' during the summer before Year 3 Regulus caught sight of Padfoot and hid. He





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watched Harry get on the Knight Bus and ask to go to Diagon Alley, and stowed away in the undercarriage or the luggage rack. Harry spent a month at the Leaky Cauldron, and only wandered into the pet shop when Hermione showed up and went looking for an owl.

The woman in the magical menagerie where Hermione got Crookshanks claims he'd been there for a long time, but what are the bets, really? Would she have kept a grown cat in a cage in a shop? We saw that he wasn't in a cage. How do we know that he hadn't been wandering around the neighborhood for no more than a few weeks and she just sold the clueless girl a local stray.



As for Tom, and Sirius's "likely story" that he had ordered Reggie's death, it's possible that if he did get some kind of feedback from the broken connection from the Dark mark he may have put it about that he had ordered Reggie's death so as to terrorize the rest of his followers. But I wouldn't count on it. That sounds more like an extrapolation made by the family once Reggie's fanboy collection of clippings about Lord Voldemort surfaced after his death date appeared on the tapestry. Or a student rumor when his death was announced at Hogwarts.

Which raises the issue that Regulus Black appears to have managed to become a marked Death Eater before he even finished school. Kreachur is quite insistent that his Master was 17 when he defied Lord Voldemort by stealing the Locket and dying for it.

I still don't believe that Tom made a general practice of Mark-

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ing schoolboys who were living in dormitories into his ranks. But he may have made the occasional exception.

Kreacher claimed that Reggie joined the DEs at 16.

His father, Orion — who Sirius claimed was *not* a Death Eater, even though he agreed with everything that Lord Voldemort claimed to stand for — has a death date of 1979 recorded on the Tapestry, and in his case, we have nothing in canon which would contradict it.

In 1979, Reggie would have been 16.

He was also now the Heir presumptive to the House of Black, Sirius having been widely understood to have been disowned some 2–3 years earlier. I think that Tom might have considered that to be worth making an exception for.

And, of course, once done, it could not be undone. No matter what the boy's mother and grandfather might think of it.

In any event it IS fun to play with.





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Well this particular essay is still a source of considerable embarrassment. Because I finally managed to find the reference that the original extrapolation was based upon. And it turned out *not* to have been from Rowling, at all.

I probably ought to have just deleted this, but it had grown a bit, and the new growth was perfectly valid extrapolation from canon (well, mostly, even after DHs), and would also have been rather more disruption than I was prepared to deal with while still in the throes of mortification.

But, I also have to admit that I *like* the silly theory, and would be rather sorry to have to see it disappear.

So, it is downgraded to something on the order of the essays on Snape's fatal weakness, or Aberforth and the goat. i.e., semi-fiction or flight of fancy.

Please accept my confession and apologies: "I is covered with rue."



It used to be a broadly popular belief throughout much of early fandom that James Potter, and possibly Lily as well, like Frank and Alice Longbottom, were all employed as Aurors at the time of their deaths at the end of October, 1981.

This was no doubt encouraged by Rowling's off the wall assertion that what the Potters had done for a living was "important." Post DHs, we are expected to conclude that it is important to fancy yourself a freedom fighter while living off your family's money. Both of the Potters were apparently unemployed.

Post-OotP, however, we were finally informed that James — let alone Lily — having been an Auror was unlikely to have been



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the case anyway. There simply did not appear to be enough *time* for James or Lily to have finished training and to become established as Aurors between leaving Hogwarts and the date that they were killed. Particularly not if you accepted the HP Lexicon's 1960 birth date on the matter as being accurate. (Which I didn't, but Rowling has since that point insisted upon it.)

According to Minerva McGonagall's list of the challenges one must meet in attempting to become an Auror (OotP, Chapter 29); Auror training takes three years to complete. If we accept the Lexicon's statement that James Potter was born in 1960 then he could not have started Hogwarts before the Autumn term of 1971. If he did not start at Hogwarts until September of '71 he could not have finished before June of 1978. This finishing date leaves only enough time for a marriage probably within the year, his wife's pregnancy established by 16 months after finishing Hogwarts, a child the following summer and an early death 15 months later. Even if James, and/or Lily had entered Auror training immediately upon leaving Hogwarts they would barely have had time to even become qualified before the summer of '81.



The Longbottoms, consequently, must have been at least a couple of years older than the Potters. Perhaps some 4 or 5 years or more. But probably not more than 10. And, for that matter, if the Callidora Longbottom *née* Black who shows up on the Black family tapestry sketch as having been born in 1915 is Frank Longbottom's grandmother (Augusta's mother-in-law) then Frank is unlikely to be significantly older than Andromeda





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Tonks *née* Black, or Lucius Malfoy.

Even if one had chosen to favor my own original interpretation of the Potterverse timeline in preference to that of the Lexicon, wherein James Potter and his classmates were born in 1959 rather than 1960, the likelihood of James Potter's having been an established Auror at the time of his death was not much better. True, he might have passed his Auror qualifications about the time his son was born, if he had, in fact, been accepted into Auror training immediately after finishing Hogwarts. But the fact is that as an Auror trainee he would have still been engaged in classwork at least as much — if not more than — fieldwork for most of the ensuing three years, and, as a trainee, would have been subject to whatever restrictions apply to the not-yet-qualified (surely there must be some, or what is the point of qualification?). As a trainee, he would probably have had less opportunity to draw Voldemort's attention to himself than if he were a private party, with no connections to the DMLE.

In any case, once examined, the notion that the Potters were Aurors all seems highly unlikely. They would still have been trainees at the point that Sybil made her Prophecy, and the notion that they were targeted because they were Aurors does not really satisfy. It is far too random and arbitrary, even for the Potterverse.

Rowling's background for the story is drawn in broad, sweeping strokes with very little attention paid to detail, or plausibility, and as such, to simply take her word for things is a fine recipe for leaving the whole backstory unexplored and unexamined. Because she didn't really do a good job of packing. You will not

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find a cohesive picture of the foundational events of the story in what Rowling has to say about the background to it. All she gives us are the highlights, and since I doubt that she considers them a "real" part of the same story, they have tended to shift over the years as new "cool ideas" occur to her. Much of it does not connect. Much of it contradicts itself. Like many terminally lazy writers, Rowling leaves it up to the reader to make all the connections for her.



One thing which is glaringly evident is that James Potter was never in the same position as Harry. He was certainly not the child foretold of some maybe-prophecy related to the fall of the Dark Lord. Frankly, James is unlikely to have ever been anything like as important to Voldemort as Harry was. But he may very well have been a continuing annoyance to Voldemort's followers. One who, in the Dark Lord's opinion, needed to be swatted, like a fly.

And, as such, he had evidently needed to be swatted well before the Prophecy was made. The Prophecy stated that by the time the child was born, those to whom he would be born would have already "defied" the Dark Lord three times.

One of the main things which we were led to believe from canon, is that somehow, between the end of his 5th year, in 1976, when we got our first glimpse of him, and the birth of his son in the summer of 1980, James Potter managed to escape from Voldemort's "attentions," or those of his followers, the requisite three times, which featured so prominently in the Trelawney Prophecy. Actually that timeline should probably be



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adjusted to the date of James Potter's finishing Hogwarts and the point that Trelawney made that Prophecy, some months before Harry's birth; narrowing the time to the period between the end of June 1978, and some point between shortly after Halloween, 1979, the earliest possible date that the Prophecy might have been made, and the summer of 1980. All of which sounds unlikely.

What I now am more likely to credit is that "those who have defied him thrice" was in fact a description of *collective* defiance. A prediction that the child would be born to someone who was a member of a *group* who had defied Lord Voldemort at least three times. By the time of Harry's birth, the Order of the Phoenix was certainly such a group. But then, so was the Ministry. Anyone who signed up for *either* of these was automatically a viable Prophecy target.



Our next point of attempting to fix a date of the Prophecy shows up in the scene in the chapter devoted to the Prince's Tale, and the meeting between Snape and Dumbledore on the windy hilltop. Fans living in Scotland have pointed out that the leafless trees on that windy hilltop where Snape turned up and confessed having told Voldemort what he had overheard would put that scene at a point around mid-November or afterwards. Which, if it took place in 1980 would have been after Harry's birth and anything up to a year after the Prophecy was made. Rowling is not to really be relied upon for weather and the state of the seasons, however. She tends to paint pretty word pictures without regard to the almanac.



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However, we have never actually been told anything which would suggest that James, himself, would be a natural target of Voldemort's wrath. The lack of any such compelling reason for James's having been so targeted, paired with the "defied him thrice" statement in the prophecy, is largely responsible for the widely held belief that he must have been an Auror and actively engaged in the war. Targeted for his function rather than on his own account.



However, the "defiance" stated in the Prophecy may not have all been of the passive "escape" variety that Dumbledore cites. I had originally thought there may have been defiance of a more active, provocative order as well. Possibly in the matter of public statements, on the part of not just James Potter himself, but that of his family.

Apparently the answer is not so simple. Further complications to our reasoning were added to the issue with Sirius Black's summation of his own life and his own associations with the Potter family before he was sent to Azkaban. Sirius claims to have left home around the age of 16, i.e., at some point after the end of his 5th year at Hogwarts, and he tells us that he had essentially camped out during the term breaks with the Potters until after his 17th birthday (probably at some point during their 6th year) and the death of his uncle Alphard who left him enough money for him to get his own place. He states that he was still welcome at the Potters' after this point, which would appear to confirm that James's parents seem to have survived until at least the end of their son's years at Hogwarts.





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In fact, it does nothing of the sort. It only suggests that Sirius Black decided to pay for his own bachelor pad during the summer before his last year at Hogwarts. Once he was of age, in short. Whereupon, I suspect that James probably spent much of his time crashing with Black, off his parents' radar. That stupid off-canon scenelet that Rowling tossed out of the two of them larking about in a car chase with Muggle police and suspected DEs on brooms would appear to have taken place during that summer.

It is widely understood from interviews that by the time of his own death, less than a handful of years after finishing school, James Potter had inherited enough money that he did not need to actually work for a living. And that by the time of Voldemort's first defeat at Godric's Hollow, Harry's only surviving close relatives were the Dursleys.



Part of this mystery was supposedly "explained" in Rowling's joint interview of July 2005, following the release of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. The answer which we were given turns out to have been far less dramatic than the fans had expected. James Potter's parents had been "getting on" in years, even by wizarding standards, when he was born. He was an only child, treasured and widely indulged (much like Draco Malfoy) and both of his parents had died suddenly of some magical ailment.

The rest of the mystery was suggested to have been cleared up by the release of the Black family tapestry's information, circa February 2006. On that tapestry is the notation of one Dorea Black, who married a Charlus Potter with a notation of "1s." If these were intended to represent James Potter's parents,



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his mother would have died by the end of the Autumn term of her son's 7th year. Since we know that James was orphaned young, it is assumed that her husband did not long survive her. Indeed, may have predeceased her. Dorea's death was recorded as having taken place in 1977. James, born in what now has been officially established as 1960 would have been 17.

Such an event may have contributed to James and Lily's early marriage. James, who was certainly anything but cold-blooded, did not enjoy being left alone in the world before he was 18. But this does not get us any farther in explaining why Voldemort would have wanted him dead.



On that issue we do at least have one clue, however. Even though Rowling appears to have gone nowhere near it.

By all accounts, particularly that of Sirius Black, James Potter honestly loathed the Dark Arts and everything to do with them. The adversarial stance he took with Severus Snape, a suspected student of the Dark Arts, ("famous" for it, when he was at school) makes it clear that this was a stance which had already been established by the time he reached his school days. His public choice of a Muggle-born bride, as well as the long association with a renegade like Sirius Black as his best friend would probably also have contributed to painting that target on his back. Three fifths of the Black family, in their generation, had already aligned themselves with the Dark Lord.

According to Lucius Malfoy, our only other source of information on this issue, Harry's parents had been "meddlesome fools too."





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Well, we have known for some time that Lily Potter was allegedly offered an authentic choice of whether or not to save herself when Voldemort finally confronted her. So it really doesn't sound as if she had mixed into anything that meant that she had to be killed for it. But James, evidently had.

Post-HBP, we realize that the Death Eaters are really a much smaller organization than we had ever been led to expect. And they're a much more *petty* organization, too. And it turns out that James Potter and Sirius Black had been at school with rather a lot of them, and they were not friends. I rather doubt that either James or Sirius would have shied off from mixing into some business of Malfoy's, or that of the Lestranges' if they discovered any and damn well felt like it, just to do them all a bad turn and thrust a spoke into their wheel. Given an opportunity, they would probably have considered it a point of honor to do so. And if it would also constitute one in the eye for Severus Snape, all the better.

Voldemort himself probably wouldn't have known James Potter from a hole in the ground, and did not care, either, but he approved the selection of him as a target. Why not? The young twerp was an avowed blood-traitor, make an object lesson of him.

And, from what we have been told about James Potter himself; if he had managed to escape a DE attack, he is unlikely to have chosen to keep his head down and live forever looking over his shoulder, trying to keep from drawing notice. He is far more likely to have stepped forward, publicly screaming defiance at the whole Death Eater movement in the pages of the DAILY PROPHET. Which would have constituted an another



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act of defiance on his tally and probably have positively invited subsequent attacks.

I postulated that James Potter was not targeted through anything like a work-related association, but because he had become something on the order of the Blood Traitors' faction's poster child. James may not have been a major wizarding celebrity on the order of his son Harry, perhaps, (from the indications in HBP, if either of the Potters was any kind of a rising star, it is more likely to have been Lily) but he was widely known. Particularly in so small a community as the wizarding world. One belatedly recalls that even on the presumed day after Voldemort's defeat, everybody seems to have already known exactly who the Potters were.

But none of this tells us anything about his source of income.



Just to make this clear; for the purposes of this essay we will be ignoring anything that has ever been posted on Pottermore. This essay went online over a decade before Pottermore existed.

Back to our original survey: A number of alert fans have noted that the inventor of the Golden Snitch, a halfblood wizard by the name of Bowman Wright (1490-1560), hailed from Godric's Hollow, and many have speculated that Wright may have been an ancestor of James Potter's and the invention of the Snitch the basis of the Potters' fortune. This is an extremely likable theory, but we have no information to either confirm nor to contradict it.

For that matter, by this point we cannot be altogether certain whether the house in Godric's Hollow was even the Pot-





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ter's own home or one that had been found for them to go into hiding at. Post-DHs it could well have been the old Dumbledore property.

But in any event, the Potters had, by the middle of the 20th century, amassed enough of a fortune for its possessor not to need to hold down a high-paying job, and to be to at least to some extent engaged in the sort of "money-farming" which is generally regarded as occupying the time and energies of the likes of Lucius Malfoy.

Among other considerations, only something on the order of such a financial safety net would have allowed James the leisure time necessary for taking an active and voluntary public stand in whatever action passes within the wizarding world as a "war effort." But that (and money farming) aren't likely to have been the only things that James Potter did. After all, neither of those activities is likely to have a lot of potential for creating fun. And James Potter did certainly like to have fun.

Well, I thought I was reasonably sharp. But sometimes I'm just not too swift. For herein follows a half-baked illustration of how sometimes it takes an amazing amount of time before the penny finally drops.

It also rather neatly illustrates how the coin can drop into the wrong box altogether, given enough time for one to become fuzzy about one's sources. And, boy howdy, did it ever manage to drop into the wrong box this time.

In other words: the following is an example of how to feel like a fool in one easy lesson.



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I am sharp enough not to confuse *actual* fanon with canon. I did NOT read the germ for this particular flight of fancy in a fanfic.

It lives in the *author's notes* of a fanfic.

Excuse me while I writhe in mortification for a moment or two.

The fanfic in question is a very *old* fanfic, and a very good one:\*\* One which I had copied and pasted into a document on my own hard drive for rereading and striped the notes out of, so as not to be tripping over them.

(\*\* Angie Astravic's 'LEGACY OF SLYTHERIN' which may be found over in the Publications section of the site.)

Consequently in the 2-3 rereads that I made over the following 3 years, I never encountered the notes, and forgot that they had ever been there. I did not, however forget the information that I had read in them. But I only remembered having read the relevant notes "online," some years earlier (around 2001, in fact).

But in any case, for a year and a half there, I thought I'd finally figured out what it was that James Potter did for a living.

And I'm rather sorry to find out that I was wrong.

What Rowling's always told us in her interviews is that most of James's money was inherited. More recently she's worded this as saying that James had come into enough money that he didn't need a well-paying job (or, one presumes, a steady one). But everything we've been told, and everything that we've seen of James Potter's disposition suggests that he would still have chosen to do *something* with himself, even if it didn't exactly pay much. And he would have wanted to have fun with it, if he could.

Well, at the end of June '04, somebody over on the Yahoo group WIKtT posted a question regarding Patroni, asking whether they always took the form of animals.





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And I was off to the races.



It was a reasonable question, certainly. And every Patronus we've ever seen in canon has taken an animal form, whether a natural animal or that of a Fantastic Beast. However, I have a fairly retentive memory and the question recalled what by that time I was misremembering as a very old Rowling interview (which I could not find any record of, obviously for good reason, since Rowling never said it. I've paid much closer attention to what Rowling has and hasn't said since that point), from some period after the release of PoA back when everyone was keenly interested in the Marauders, and Patroni were the newest variety of magic on the block, wherein we had been informed — or so I quite clearly recalled — in response to the question of what form James Potter's Patronus had taken, that the form of James Potter's Patronus had been a nose-biting teacup.

As it was presented, he had evidently been trying to develop one and was so delighted when he succeeded (do we really need to guess just whose nose ended up getting bitten?) that the silly thing eventually dictated the form that his Patronus took.

Well, the author's notes are indeed presented in Q&A format, and the style of humor inherent in a nose-biting teacup Patronus is certainly not something that I believed that Rowling was incapable of. Three years later I think that having confused it with a Rowling interview is not *that* unreasonable.

But; it's simply, entirely, **WRONG**.



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However, back in 2004, my recollection was:

Well, excuse me, but weren't we told in PoA that nose-biting teacups one of the items sold at Zonko's?

Well, yes, they are. I checked. But that confirmation on its own didn't manage to clue me in that I was on the wrong track, or to head me off. Rather the contrary.

Ergo, one had to ask; unless he was attempting to improve on the commercial version, why would James Potter try to make a nose-biting teacup if he could have just gone out and bought one? He had no shortage of pocket money.

Unless nose-biting teacups *weren't* an item sold by Zonko's back then.

Unless James was the person who *invented* them in the first place!

— And either sold the procedure to Zonko (or Zonko's supplier), or patented it and was paid a royalty on every one sold. Harry's Gringotts account might still be collecting a steady trickle of knuts from James Potter's nose-biting teacup. And quite possibly from other similar items that James developed as well. We do not know how long magical patents last. But I doubt that they expire in a mere 10 years.

Hagrid comments that Fred and George Weasley would have given James and Sirius a run for their money, but he never claimed that the Weasleys had outclassed them. Nor can one imagine that Fred and George would have been particularly likely to "outgrow" their interest in creating ever bigger and better prank devices by the time they reached the age of 21. Which was James's probable age at the time he was killed. And indeed they didn't. Or, rather, George didn't.





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Even without the Weasley twins' spur of actually *needing* to make enough money to live on, I simply can no longer imagine any vocation which is so likely to have been as attractive to a young James Potter as the development of the sort of joke items which are sold at Zonko's.

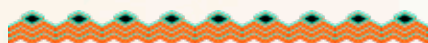
Rendering Harry's decision to back the twins financially a singularly apt bit of poetic justice, and an eminently fitting memorial.



But, in the event, the nose-biting teacup Patronus is not a Rowling invention, so by chasing after it we find we are left in a blind alley.

And we are left with No Clue, as to what James Potter's Patronus was (assuming that it *wasn't* necessarily a stag) and no idea what it was (if anything) that James Potter really *did* do for supplementary income, and that for all Rowling really *did* say in one old interview that it was "important," and also that we would eventually find out, I suspect that this piece of information is one of the minor threads that she discarded in the wake of the 3-month revision which was made to the series outline between GoF and OotP.

And, for the record, even though "James Potter; inventor of joke products" is all but guaranteed to be wrong, I still like the idea.



## His Fatal Weakness

This one was never actually intended seriously. It's more in the nature of a joke.

At that, it's still one of the oldest essays in the collection.



**A**aaaannd now for something completely off the wall... This flight of fancy came out of thin air many years ago, and I've no idea why. Because it has nothing to do with *anything*. It's certainly not a part of any collection of serious attempts to interpret the books.

In point of fact, it is pure comic relief. And is totally ignorable for anyone whose fanfics require a different interpretation, and have no provision for rather low comedy.

But anyone who wants to use it is welcome.

And in all accuracy, it is really no more off the wall now than it was before DHs came out.

There used to be a tradition in early Snape fandom, particularly in its younger branches, to believe that the only reason why Snape didn't make the cut — along with James and Sirius — as one of "the cleverest students at Hogwarts" — which evaluation, it should be pointed out, was young Remus Lupin's, not that of anyone who was actually on staff at the time — was due to some notable weakness in one or other of the school's core subjects.

Post-HBP, it is clear that had anyone but Remus Lupin been asked their opinion of the matter, Snape would certainly have made the cut. No question. The "halfblood Prince" was a very clever chap. And all of Rowling's backpedaling in an attempt to





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depict him as terminally clueless throughout 'The Prince's Tale' fails to convince any actual Snape fan otherwise.

(With 20/20 hindsight, it is now evident that in HBP she had simply given us a "new Snape," in fact the Über-Snape, much as she gave us a "new Draco," or yet another iteration and amplification of the "new Ginny." Most of us would have liked to have kept the Über-Snape for longer than the duration of just one book.)



Frankly, I think it most probable that in the unlikely event that Snape still did not make the cut, his performance (like Harry's, when you stop and think about it) in anything that he was interested in, or that he considered important to his interests would have been at the top of the charts and anything he saw as boring or irrelevant he blew off, and barely scraped an A (for "Acceptable.")

For a while, early in the series, it seemed not impossible, although not entirely convincing, to reflect that Snape may have been one of the brighter students who simply did not appear to have particularly strong magic until his powers started catching up to the rest of him in his 5th-7th years. By which time the other students would have grown used to thinking of him as being unpleasant, but not particularly powerful, and not much of a threat to be taken seriously. But there is no canon support for this.

In fact it tends to contradict the (probably skewed, but we have no idea in which direction) summation of First year Snape's abilities with curses and hexes, as was given us by



## His Fatal Weakness

Sirius Black in GoF. And in the wake of HBP it all seems vanishingly unlikely.

In those days, most of the teeny-boppers and pre-teens over on ff.net tended to take his House rivalry with McGonagall as their springboard and work from the position that if Snape and McGonagall don't get on (which is not all that strongly indicated in books 1-6, btw) then Snape's alleged weakness was in Transfiguration. Which I think is improbable, since Transfiguration and Potions (and Alchemy) are all fairly closely related fields. And the similarity in structure between charms and curses makes Charms an unlikely candidate to have been Snape's Achilles' heel as well.

For that matter, of all the instructors at Hogwarts, Snape and Minerva seem to be the two who are most alike in style. Both stern, in fact harsh. Indeed, he may well have deliberately set out to model his classroom manner upon hers (he certainly didn't model it on Slughorn's). That in itself would guarantee that they would probably lock horns on a regular basis over their smaller differences, but ultimately would be more expected to tend to have similar outlooks than otherwise.



Well, I think I may have figured it out.

Or, rather, this interpretation blindsided me when I was innocently going about my own business. And I think it has possibilities — in humorous potential if in nothing else.

If Snape had any single notable weakness while a student at Hogwarts I am now convinced that it was in... (drumroll, please) Herbology.





## His Fatal Weakness

Yes. That's right. Herbology.

It's not that young Snape lacked any grasp on a basic understanding of the subject. Oh no. He was, after all, probably in the top 5th-10th percentile of his year. Regardless of how he stacked up against James Potter and Sirius Black. And, given that plants provide a third to a half of all common Potions ingredients, Snape would have been quite *interested* in Herbology. He could probably have reeled Herbology theory at you off the top of his head *à la* Hermione Granger until you ran for cover.

No, that was not the problem.

The problem, or rather, (cue portentous voice here) \*The Problem\* is that — he kills the plants.

He has a black thumb.

At his very best he may kill them more *slowly* than otherwise. But; any plant he tries to tend ALWAYS dies. And this is all the more galling because plants ARE the source of at least a third to half of all his Potions ingredients.

(He was no great shakes at Care of Magical Creatures either, but since it was an elective he simply didn't take that. He couldn't get out of Herbology.)

Eventually the Herbology teacher of his day (possibly Sprout, but just as likely to have been her predecessor) had to forbid him to go anywhere near his or her rarer specimens, all of which brought his average down in that class enough to thoroughly compromise his final grades, regardless of his depth of understanding of Herbology theory. Fortunately the results of one's Herbology practicals for the OWLs or NEWTs are not graded upon the state of the plants a week later. He did perfectly well on those.



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A perennially unsatisfactory grade on the standard Hogwarts tests in such a key subject would have pulled his overall average down however. Particularly since there would have already been a couple of subjects that he had been blowing off out of boredom or sheer bloody-mindedness. And, given the rather elementary flub he made over the most likely place to find a kappa, on the day he took over Lupin's class. I wouldn't have been surprised to learn that any part of DADA that dealt with Dark Creatures rather than the Dark Arts was one of those that he blew off.

And even if it wasn't, (and from our trip into the Pensieve it now seems likely that it wasn't) he may have been put so totally off his stride by the hazing incident that we witnessed for him to have messed up his DADA practical, which would have taken place later that afternoon. Which would have truly pissed him off royally.

And more than just that, if it meant that he wasn't able to take the class at NEWT-level. Although, since he originally applied for the DADA position, *that's* not likely. But it could have made the difference between an E and an O.

As a Potions Master, it still irritates Snape that he is dependent upon other people to grow the plants that he needs. But this has become a comparatively minor irritation over the years. Once they have been harvested, he is able to prepare any of the plant materials that he needs by himself without further problems. Dead plants cause him no inconvenience at all. Once they are *supposed* to be dead, that is.





## His Fatal Weakness

Or at least it was a minor irritation until Longbottom came along.

That this complete dolt with magic that he could not — or, rather, *would* not — control, who was unable to make a competent potion if his life depended upon it, and was not significantly better off in any of his other courses was *still* able to do what he, Severus, cannot, was just one too many.

Severus just did not handle that well.



## The Pachyderm in the Parlor

This piece has gone through a number of iterations. It spent something like a decade plus in the UNhallowed collection, under the name of 'The Premature Prediction', back when I still divided the collection between parts that were mostly canon-compliant, and parts that quite blatantly weren't. It doesn't at all comply with the series conclusion act 'HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS'.

After all, it was originally written back when we could still try to guess which way the series was headed.

Later it spent a handful of years in this sub-collection under its previous title of; 'The Elephant in the Room'

I'm still inclined to think that in its original version, it might have been a better direction than the one Rowling took. But then, I happily concede that it was only one of a broad spectrum of potential directions that would have been better than the one that she ended up taking us.

And, in any case, by this time, this essay no longer explores possible directions that the series might have taken.

Instead, it now explores one of the biggest Never Answered Questions in the Potterverse.

Indeed, considering the impact that the Dementors have had upon the whole society of the Potterverse, there is astonsih-ingly little actually written about them inside of canon. And what there is is suspiciously contradictory.

To the point that any theory which is applied to them, however internally sound, is inevitably going to read more like fanfic than any kind of a solid theory.

Which is why this is here, rather than the Oh Wide, Wide (Wizarding) World, or Harry Potter and the Dark Lord subcollection.





## The Pachyderm in the Parlor



**O**riginally this essay was concerned with the ultimate solution of the conflict between Harry Potter and the Dark Lord, and an extrapolation of one of the possibilities.

A number of the parts of that essay are still duplicated in a portion of the essay; "Redeeming the Potterverse" to be found in The 7th Son sub-collection. Possibly selected bits may be scattered around in other essays as well.

At that point of the series (roughly OotP-era), in some respects there seemed to be a good deal less to this problem than first met the eye, and there also seemed a great deal less real mystery regarding the ultimate resolution of this conflict than Rowling was attempting to inject.

Was there any reader of this series, any reader At All, who seriously believed for one minute that JK Rowling would permit Voldemort to *win*?

Of course not. The one great uncertainty was not whether or not Harry would ultimately manage to defeat Lord Voldemort, but whether Harry would manage to defeat Lord Voldemort *and survive*. There had been endless debate on this issue from the first interview in which Mrs Rowling mischievously tossed out the suggestion that he might not.

Up to the end of Book 5 there was comparatively little in the text to say for certain whether she intended to take the question of Harry's survival in one direction or the other. Later, with HBP she introduced a very real possibility that his survival could quite legitimately be in doubt.



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The commonest argument, that; "these are *children's* books! She can't kill the hero! Her young readers would be *upset!*" is a totally unconvincing line of defense. And completely useless for any kind of prediction.

Child heroes have died at the end of "their" stories before this, and under such circumstances as having their deaths presented as the greatest of all possible victories, too, on a steadily recurring basis in fact, and, to the best of my understanding, no one has ever suggested burning Hans Christian Andersen in effigy for it yet.

Nor is Andersen the only author to have made a habit of killing off the young viewpoint character of the story, or book, or series of books deliberately intended to be marketed to children at the end of the last installment (although Andersen was certainly the worst offender about it). Indeed, making children cry was a positive fetish of the majority of 19th century authors of works written for children. It may be out of fashion, but it *can* be done, it has *been* done. The only question was whether or not Rowling would choose to do it too.

But by that particular point in the story arc; five books into a series of seven, it had to be admitted that while we were certainly still missing any number of details from the back-story, and the young hero still appeared to have several difficult life lessons yet to master before he would be ready for the final confrontation, the majority of the main puzzle pieces seemed to have probably already been turned over to us. The then-forthcoming 'HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE' already had already a strong feel of being an "answer" book. By which I mean that it had the feel of being the book in





## The Pachyderm in the Parlor

which we would finally get a good many answers to questions that had already been asked. (After the event: boy howdy!)

And I thought that while Rowling might very well throw us still another variety of non-standard magic to which we had not yet been properly introduced, and that we would probably learn a bit more about the greater wizarding world, she wasn't likely to be tossing us (the readers, that is, not necessarily Harry, the character) a whole lot of brand new concepts. We could all pretty well anticipate what direction she was likely to be taking us by that time.



Well, I obviously wasn't as on-target in that estimation as I thought I was.

And that goes double, in spades, for DHs.

Particularly as regards the matter of new concepts. She threw us several new ones in HBP and even more in DHs (not all of them, imho, necessary). And she took several other matters into a number of totally unanticipated detours. Indeed, she completely discarded and dismissed any number of the elements that she had spent most of Book 5 putting into place, and hauled us off in a different direction entirely.

And then, in book 7, she did the same thing again.

This was the underlying reason for so much of the readers' dissatisfaction with Book 6, and even more of the same for book 7. We thought we *knew* this story, and then she went and told us a *different* story and insulted us by trying to *pretend* that it was the same story — when we could all see perfectly well that it *wasn't*.



## The Pachyderm in the Parlor

It felt like bait-and-switch.

I had also not anticipated that she would abruptly reverse several of the major underlying assumptions that she had been at great pains to foster over the first five books; nor that she would taunt us with the revelation that she had sold us a series of school stories about a teenage dropout.

But, back at that still fairly innocent point at the end of OotP, it had seemed to me that she already shot herself in the foot if she really wanted to retain any mystery about the end of the series when she had exercised the sheer, amateurish bad taste of hanging her whole storyline on something as tacky as a Prophecy. She was inexperienced and unpublished when she claims she first drafted the story out. But she also claimed to have drafted out the whole outline for the whole series at that point, and that she had not materially departed from that outline, however many smaller details and events may have shifted about or changed (or expanded!) in the course of writing it.

Prophecies are such bloody \*stupid\* plot devices. And they generate stupid plots. Or they manage to exponentially dumb down plots that weren't stupid to begin with. Anyone over the age of 20 who thinks that tossing a Prophecy into their story is a "cool" idea needs their head examined.

Apart from the rare instances where the function of the Prophecy is to make a May game of everyone, or the even rarer instances where a Prophecy is made and everyone goes "Wibble, wibble, wibble," and then drops the subject until the last chapter, and the story's basically over and the Prophecy either came true or it didn't, but no one really cares, the only thing I can ever recall seeing a Prophecy contribute to a sto-





## The Pachyderm in the Parlor

ryline is a crude glossing over of lazy plotting.

Let's face it; you cannot really squeeze a lot of ambiguity out of "...*And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives.*"

That's either/or, cookie. Writ large in letters of fire. Not both. And we already know that Voldemort is not going to win.

And in the event it turns out that it wasn't even the truth. It wasn't that neither could *live* while both survived, it was that neither could properly *die* while both survived. Or not so long as both of them survived *in Harry*.

And any attempt to inject additional interpretations into the statement usually appeared to be the kind of over-complex wankfest which may make for interesting mental exercises and word games, but are vanishingly unlikely to actually be deployed by an author who is exceedingly well aware that she needs to keep the principles of the story accessible to 9-year-olds.

Which, in the end, is pretty much what she gave us. After falsely raising our expectations to anticipate something more.



I do have to grudgingly admit that without the bloody Prophecy, most of Riddle's subsequent actions and motivations regarding Harry Potter become incomprehensible.

Mind you, I'll have to say that I was relieved to learn in her website update of May 2005 that yes, she was playing 'Macbeth', and the damn Prophecy was *supposed* to be self-fulfilling. I guess if you are determined to "embrace the cheese" you might as well flaunt it.

And, in any event, in HBP she managed to toss a very large

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spanner into my assumptions regarding the whole either/or situation, too. She did a good job of making it look as though it might very well turn out that it would have to be "both" in order to permanently take out the Dark Lord.



However, none of the above tells us squat about how the conclusion was going to be brought about, or what was likely to be done about addressing the REAL problem threatening the continuing safety of the wizarding world.

Because by that time it ought to have been obvious to any reader that the biggest problem that the wizarding world had was not Voldemort. And getting rid of him was not going to solve it. To all appearances, Voldemorts are the result of the underlying problem. They are not the cause.

Tom Riddle was just exercising an opportunistic determination to take advantage of the situation. He himself was almost completely unrelated to any of it. He was a total outsider. In fact, he was a virtual non-sequitur.

In which case, what was Rowling's point? I still don't understand the message that the lady was attempting to send. I am a native of an allegedly English-speaking country but something is being lost in translation.

At the end of HBP I suspected that for all that we had been deliberately given the *impression* that we now knew all there was to know about the young Tom Riddle, we were still clearly missing the crucial piece of information which would snap it all into focus and make it clear what we would have to do to deal with him.



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Post-HBP it was also finally unmistakable to any reader that the wizarding world that Rowling presents is practically the antithesis of one of Elizabeth Goudge's slightly-flawed little earthly paradises. This is emphatically not the hidden valley of 'THE LITTLE WHITE HORSE' with a villain who can simply be bought off by giving him what he really wants, and to which he has a perfectly valid claim.

Now that we'd finally been given a good look at it, it is glaringly evident that the whole wizarding government, and the society which supports it, is hopelessly corrupt.

And getting rid of Voldemort isn't going to do a thing about that.

And trying to claim that an 18-year-old Harry Potter and his friends are going to go to work for that government and "clean it all up" is a bloody lie. Those kids haven't a ghost of a chance of doing anything of the sort.

The whole British WW is a nasty little dystopia on close to the same general magnitude as the society depicted in Orwell's '1984', and while Rowling seemed determined to rub our noses in that fact, on every conceivable opportunity, she gave us absolutely no indication that she had any more intention of fixing any part of it than Orwell did.

I mean, really! What have we got here? This is a "world" whose government was established by engaging in a partnership with *Dementors* in order to control its citizenry!

Hold that thought.



This is a society which — above every other consideration — is ruled by fear. In fact the wizarding "world" was \*created\*

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out of fear. At that point in history, it was a rational fear, to be sure, given western Europe in the throes of the Reformation, but nevertheless, its underlying foundation still was fear. And in 300 years that hasn't changed one iota. The underlying motivation of the entire wizarding world is **STILL** fear. In fact the whole sorry lot clutches at its fears as if they were its only hope of order and salvation.

Not courage, not honor. Not cleverness or wisdom. Not even cunning and ambition, and *certainly* not loyalty and hard work.

**FEAR.**

And that kind of atmosphere attracts predators. Voldemort and his Death Eaters are predators.

Voldemort and his followers prey on their world's fears. Tom Riddle's entire justification in life seems to be to create panic. He and his followers' every action was calculated simply to make people *afraid* of them.

Even in DHs after the Ministry fell and the DEs had taken control, they were not really running the Ministry. Established sympathetic-minded Ministry wonks like Umbridge were doing that, and running it to what were their own agendas. The DEs may have taken positions in the Ministry in expectation of future advancement. They would give the Ministry wonks a nudge here or there, sometimes via an Imperioed puppet who was already in position, but they certainly didn't hang up their masks and all settle down to actually run the government.

They specialize. Their sole occupation seems to be to wantonly inspire fear, and to cause pain — thereby creating more fear — and to harvest it. Very much as the Dementors themselves do. Right up to DHs we had never heard of any action



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undertaken by the Death Eaters which would enable them to do anything so sordid or pedestrian as to turn a profit. Indeed, more and more they come across as a self-supporting foundation exclusively dedicated to the manufacture and distribution of top-grade terror. Phobos & Demos Incorporated. Lord Voldemort, CEO. The European Union is their marketplace.

And frightened people do horrible things.

Particularly to anyone that can be identified as the Other. Them. Not Us.

The Giants, one of the elder races, have been expelled and forced into a social system that is both unnatural to them, and is gradually destroying them. They now number less than one hundred, and from the general attitude of wizards, the sooner the last of them kill each other off the better. The Goblins, for all their recognized intelligence and skill are 2nd-class citizens. The House Elves are enslaved outright. The Centaurs, credited as being wiser than average, and the Merrows have both withdrawn behind their own barricades which they jealously guard, and with good cause, for they cannot reasonably expect any better treatment from wizards than the rest of the wizards' "allies." Any other magical race of Beings — nature spirits of various sorts for the most part — seem to live completely at the discretion of wizards. And for about the first hundred years or so of Seclusion any of the Muggle-born who did not live in proximity to covert wizards were largely abandoned to their fate amid the fields of alien corn. And over the 300 years that the wizarding world has existed, the whole situation has only become steadily worse. Producing an environment in which predators like the Death Eaters and their allies can flourish.



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Clearly the "fatal flaw" was inherent in the foundation of this secret world and has only continued to perpetuate itself.

Ghods knows the Muggles of the Potterverse don't exist in anything resembling an earthly paradise, either, but at least they didn't make a formal pact with (a race of?) soul-sucking demons in order to establish what passes for a civil justice system.

And just what does pass for justice in the wizarding world? Where the Muggle's Great Britain is (one assumes) founded upon a common-law system which presumes the innocence of the accused and all wrongdoing ideally must be proven by the State, in the wizarding world one can be packed off to Azkaban without trial, often for no reason beyond that of expedience, or as a public gesture to enhance the Ministry's image. Not only during wartime as Sirius Black, Stan Shunpike, and others experienced, but also in the middle of peacetime as Hagrid did, and even Albus Dumbledore could not gainsay it.

Indeed, it begins to read less as though the guilty are being consigned to prison for their crimes, than that the Ministry is identifying "expendables" for the purpose of "paying tiend." And in DHs this was extended to apply to a full quarter of the population.

I speculate that at the wizarding world's inception, the wizarding leaders effectively made a pact with the Dementors. And, demon or Dementor, what does the bargaining chip in such a pact always traditionally consist of? What do such creatures *want* from humans?



The inception for this particular article was an essay posted in





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2004 on the LiveJournal of a fan going by the name of no\_remorse.

[http://www.livejournal.com/users/no\\_remorse/37105.html](http://www.livejournal.com/users/no_remorse/37105.html)

This post knocked a few of my prior assumptions loose, and forcibly reminded me of some details that I'd been steadily either dismissing or overlooking. After the eventual release of HBP, it was reluctantly borne in on me that my original assumptions were not necessarily wrong, and my epiphany likely to be illusory. But even if incorrect, the conclusion was still worth exploring.

And at least one component of that epiphany I still could not dismiss.

It finally, abruptly (and, I'll admit, rather reluctantly) became evident to me that there was a good chance that the Dementors were not, as I had been assuming, merely the series's nebulous nasties from Central Casting. Symbolically, the Dementors appeared to be the key to everything that is *wrong* about the wizarding world today, and which has probably been wrong with it from its beginning.

And the problem may be extended beyond the merely symbolic.

As has been pointed out in the text of the books, the Dementors are the "natural allies" of Dark Lords. And, in what appears to have been Rowling's original intention, since its inception, the wizarding world seemed to have periodically been plagued with "Dark Lord" candidates. And I really don't think that in the days before wizards cut themselves off from the wider "human" society, this was so likely to have been the case.

Attempts at retcons posted on Pottermore, notwithstanding.

No. In the days that wizards were simply humans with magic, the problem was Dark wizards, not Dark Lords. And

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the wizarding world has had ample experience in dealing with Dark wizards. Indeed, with HBP it became evident that the term "Dark wizard" in day-to-day usage, may mean nothing more impressive than the wizarding equivalent of felon, and is less indicative of the type of magic used by such a wizard than the fact that he makes a habit of considering himself above the law, and behaving accordingly.

But apparently the MoM just doesn't send a team of Aurors out to shut down a potential Dark "Lord." Not if their response to the former Tom Riddle is anything to go by. Somehow Dark Lords appear to be something that the wizarding world just does not have any kind of a handle on dealing with — which sends it into a gibbering panic.

Very much like the reaction of someone who cannot cast a Patronus when confronted by a Dementor, if you stop to think about it.

And whether Lord Voldemort is in the typical style of Dark Lords, or if he was redefining the term as he went along, he seems to have gone out of his way to reinvent himself as a Dementor surrogate.

(Hold that thought. We will be taking a closer look at it before we are through.)



All of which leads one to belatedly wonder whether Dark Lords may indeed be something comparatively new on the block.

A separate wizarding "world" has only been around for some 300 years.

And, after all, if there is no separate wizarding world, then



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there will hardly be a tradition of magical megalomaniacs trying to rule it, will there? Unless the Potterverse, unlike our own, mostly parallel world has a history of Dark wizards attempting to rule the Muggle world. Which has not ever been suggested in canon, although it must have sometimes been the case, since this attitude is nothing more than the underlying philosophy of wizarding “supremacy.” Which can hardly be *recent*.

And just where are the Dementors in all of this? They seem to have made a bargain with the leaders of the wizarding world. But I don’t get the impression that striking an honorable bargain with anyone would be all that much in their style. They’ve got their allotted franchise in this new world, but is that likely to satisfy them? We keep hearing about all those Goblin rebellions (another group with its own franchise), but I suspect that an open rebellion isn’t much in the Dementors’ style either. So what is?

When the Dementors were first brought onstage in PoA it was possible, even in the face of strong counter-suggestions, to regard them as mindless appetites kept firmly under Ministry control.

But Dumbledore’s exhortation to Cornelius Fudge in GoF, that they would not continue to obey him if Voldemort returned, ought to have belatedly clued us in that they are probably not mindless — although it does raise the question of why Dumbledore would expect them not continue to obey the Ministry *this* time, when by all accounts they *had* done so the *last* time.

I cannot see the Dementors being awarded control of Azkaban prison by the Ministry if they had supported Voldemort in his first rise, and no one in canon has ever suggested that they did.

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The Dementors have also been consistently described as “evil.” I do not think that true evil is likely to be completely mindless. It may have what amounts to a “mass mind.” Its reasoning may be very basic. But it is usually capable of some form of reason. And it generally wants something. Typically dominance over everything that it interacts with.

The fact is that we do not know nearly as much about these creatures as we need to. In PoA we were told that Muggles cannot even see them, although they can feel their effect. On the face of it, this would suggest that they are native to the spirit plane. However, Rowling’s explanation posted on her original official website regarding Squibs effectively told us that Arabella Figg was lying when she claimed that Squibs can see Dementors, although it had already been made clear in canon that Squibs can usually see ghosts. And Filch can certainly see Peeves.

This may be no more than an indication that one size does not fit all Squibs any more than it fits all wizards. But it is still an inconsistency.

But in HBP we were told that the Dementors were *breeding*, which would suggest that they must be to at least some degree material Beings rather than purely Spirits.

If they breed, then it would seem logical to conclude that they can also die, for otherwise the world would be overrun with them. But we are given no hint of what would kill them. Even a Patronus, which Remus Lupin describes as a sort of “anti-dementor” only drives them away.

And just what is a Patronus, when it is at home? Lupin’s full definition goes: “— a guardian that acts as a shield between



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*you and the dementor.”...“The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the dementor feeds upon — hope, happiness, the desire to survive — but it cannot feel despair, as real humans do, so the dementors can’t hurt it.”*

He goes on to caution Harry that the incantation will only work if one is concentrating with all one’s might upon a single, very happy memory.

It’s true that over the course of the series we have gotten some exaggerated and wildly inaccurate statements from Remus Lupin, but we cannot count upon this being one of them. Or, certainly not intentionally.

Still, once examined, it certainly appears to be completely back-to-front. It is demonstrably not *positive* feelings that Dementors feed upon but *negative* ones. Anyone who is confronted by a Dementor will find himself overwhelmed by his own *worst* memories, to the exclusion of all else. That is what the Dementor has to be after, or otherwise it would hardly keep digging deeper and deeper into your subconscious to drag more of such memories out of you.

If Dementors actually *did* feed upon happy memories you would expect their proximity to cause their victims to helplessly generate those. It reads more as if the Dementors just throw any happy memories away. Like the bag that their crisps came in, and the Patronus is such a tough piece of plastic wrap that they cannot get it open. (I guess we can assume from this that Dementors have no teeth.)

Yet, at the same time, it seems even harder to believe that the whole ww has been reading the situation back-to-front since time immemorial.



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Maybe we are asking the wrong questions.  
Just how long have there *been* Dementors?  
And where did they come from in the first place?  
On that I have no suggestions.



Note: For the purpose of this essay I am going to overlook any reference to the wizard Ezkridis (or however he spells it), which I gather is something that was posted on Pottermore some years after canon was closed. My understanding is that this was a 13th or 14th century Dark Lord who created Azkaban fortress, and whose experiments resulted in Dementors. If this were actual canon, I would consider it, but it isn’t. It’s a retcon, and I am not even sure that it came from Rowling.



It seems pretty clear that the Dementors cannot rule the wizarding world by themselves. Not directly. They are not willing to communicate well enough with other species to be able to control them in the way a ruler must. They appear to only want to feed off others. (And besides, they are blind, only sensing the presence of others by tracking their emotions, which has to slow them down or put them at at least some disadvantage.) Yet they seem to be willing to attach themselves to whatever ruling body takes control and will give them their preferred payment.

A ruling body which doesn’t will just have to deal with their preying on its constituency, and that lack of protection might mean they do not long remain a ruling body.





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But a Dark Lord proxy certainly could rule this world for them, in their stead, and for their benefit.

And perhaps they don't just wait around for likely prospects to crop up by accident.

Maybe they stay on the alert for conditions which would allow them to try to *create* one.



When you stop and think of it, such conditions must necessarily be rare.

To begin with, they would need to find a magical child of considerable inherent power. A low-powered wizard would hardly be able to get very far in World Domination™. Ideally, a higher than average degree of intelligence would also be wanted. The child would need the smarts to figure out a way to take control of the wizarding world after all. Or at least to be able to evade the authorities and to keep it stirred up.

Powerful children, even intelligent powerful children are not as uncommon as all that, but the Dementors may not really be able to evaluate a human infant for those qualities.

And Riddle was just a lucky catch.

Because what the Dementors seem really to require is a *\*newborn\** child. A child which has already formed attachments and taken the first steps toward normal human interactions would already be of no use to them, except as the source of a soul to devour.

Moreover, they would prefer this hypothetical child to be without any established ties of affection which might protect him. For *their* purposes, the child should be absolutely alone

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in the world, since for him to have formed even the most basic attachment would give him something else to cling to. A "patron" as it were. When you stop and think of it, such conditions must necessarily be rare.

And it practically goes without saying that it is also just about essential for the Dementors' purposes for such a child to have fallen into Muggle hands. Otherwise their interference would be noted. Muggles, however, cannot see Dementors, are powerless against them, and cannot interfere.



Such a hypothesis might be developed into a rather interesting reason for why Salazar Slytherin so mistrusted Muggle-borns, but we will not follow that particular siren's song here. I'll leave that one for the fanfic writers. For one thing, there appears to be no indication that Dementors existed in the Founders' day.

We know that the Dementors were never absolutely confined to Azkaban. They were the guards of the prison, not the prisoners. And while the MoM only rarely calls them away from the island, I don't really think the MoM ever took much account of their actions whenever one of them went off to prowl through the Muggle world. The MoM is really concerned only with the wizarding world's security. Muggles cannot see Dementors. Therefore the safety of the wizarding world is not being threatened by a Dementor roaming at large among Muggles. I think that in the Potterverse, the Dementors may have gone prowling through Muggle society on a fairly regular basis.

And what is likely to be the effect of a Dementor "just hanging around" in a child's nursery? Muggles cannot see Dementors.



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tors, but they certainly feel the effects of their proximity.

A child's caretakers might be so affected that they never quite manage to develop much feeling at all for that little scrap, mightn't they? And with a Dementor hovering about, the kid's not going to be doing all that well either. He may never manage to develop the degree of confidence or trust to be able to try form any kind of attachment to his caretakers — or anyone else. An intelligent, unprotected, \*highly magical\* infant would be a positive gift to the Dementors, wouldn't it?

Particularly once their tampering has rendered him incapable of comprehending the meaning or purpose of any human social contract.

Because once that particular opportunity is lost, it tends not to come around again. There is no making up for lost time.

Once the initial damage is done, the Dementors could probably safely withdraw and leave their unwitting "godchild" to recover his balance and develop like a cuckoo in the nest. And, if British, eventually that little cuckoo will be sent a Hogwarts letter.

Such a hypothesis could certainly account for what we were shown, and told of the young Tom Riddle.



For that matter something along these lines might even account for the leeching of magic, and the profound failure of the will to live which effectively killed Tom's mother, Merope. You certainly don't get the impression that Merope Gaunt was likely to have been able to produce a Patronus, do you?

Indeed, how do we know that the crippling despair that Merope Riddle fell into after her husband left her didn't eventu-

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ally attract one. One which sensed that she bore young, which they could use. When she finally stumbled up the steps of that (Muggle) orphanage she might not have been alone.

For that matter, she may have already shown up on the Dementors' radar, before young Tom was even an issue.

We have been told that Dementors inhabit the darkest, filthiest of places. Places of hopelessness and despair.

Sounds a lot like what we were shown of the House of Gaunt, doesn't it?

Indeed, the Gaunt hovel was exactly the kind of place that would have made a Dementor feel right at home. Particularly when Morfin was living there by himself. Or perhaps, after Marvolo returned from Azkaban to find his daughter fled, leaving him on his own. He died there, at some point in the two and a half years before his son followed him home. The place was isolated enough to have made it unlikely that any of the Gaunts would have been able (or willing) to call for assistance if so confronted. One wonders whether the Dementors might have followed "one who got away."

And from the situation in PoA, we know that if there is any one thing that really gets them riled up it is for someone to manage to get away from them.

Albus implies that Marvolo staved to death there in his hovel. From what we saw, at the end of GoF, someone who has been administered the Dementors' Kiss is unlikely to be performing even such basic chores as cooking for and feeding themselves, are they?





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Which opens another, even uglier line of inquiry.

We know that Merope's father and brother were hauled off to Azkaban in the summer of 1925 or thereabouts.

Was it just a team of Aurors who hauled them away, or did they get help from the Prison itself? After escaping from the enraged Gaunts, Bob Ogden would have certainly reported that they were NOT likely to "come quietly."

Did one of the Dementor guards sniff around and spot that here was a third potential victim in an isolated place that no human is likely to be seeking out? A victim who was probably unable to defend herself?

By the time it glided back to settle down for a private snack, some weeks, or months, later, had the bird already flown?

It probably wouldn't have liked that, at all.

The Ministry, like I say, doesn't seem to raise much of a fuss about a Dementor doing an occasional sweep through Muggle districts so long as it is discrete about it and leaves wizards alone.

Did that particular Dementor make a point of doing the occasional sweep every few months to see if it could pick up the girl's trail? Did it work its way gradually south from the Yorkshire/Lancashire area where the Riddle house and the Gaunt hovel are probably situated until it finally reached London, and hit pay dirt?

Because I'm three-quarters convinced that Merope was not unaccompanied when she finally staggered up the steps of that orphanage. And her lapsing into total silence for her final hour of life, after only giving her child a name and hoping he would resemble his papa sounds highly suspicious to me. In fact, it sounds far too much like our last glimpse of Barty Crouch Jr.



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And if the Dementors are aware of anything about their effect on the very young, might that one have decided to pay further visits? I really do think that Tom's exaggerated terror of death (and of the dark) is suspicious in itself.

And, for that matter, what do you suppose would be the effect of *prenatal* exposure to Dementors over the last trimester of a pregnancy? That may need to be considered in the equation as well.



And what of Mrs Cole's description? "He was a funny baby. Hardly ever cried, you know. And then, when he got a little older, he was... odd."

Hardly ever cried? What was he doing then? Lying there, silent and terrified? What a horrible thought! I should think such a child *would* turn out... odd.

And even in a best-case scenario, a lack of crying probably meant that he did not get the attention he needed from the staff, who, from what we were able to see of the place, were generally harried and run off their legs. A child who did not cry would have been passed over in favor of one who did.



But the essential wrongness of the whole wizarding world's situation, as it stands, is just too complex and too deeply-rooted for any single act from "our young hero" to be able to set it all right, all at once. Or even to make a decent start.

Dying for this world will not save it.

So what might?





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And at the point that this question is raised we need to step back and take a long clear look at just what kind of story we are dealing with, and what sort of writer its author is, or at least what kind of writer she *claims* to be.

On this matter we get a fairly wide latitude of choice. Rowling has flip-flopped back and forth over the years in her statements as to what she is trying to accomplish in this series. At some periods over the past decade she has appeared to be attempting to attain some degree of depth. For the final two books, however, she appears to be waving about the shallowest of possible answers and “embracing the cheese.”

My own instincts, up to the point that the original iteration of this essay was written, i.e., Easter 2005, had been to read the series as a single, fairly long, rather complex detective adventure. And the structure of the first four books certainly constitute an invitation to do so. Each of the first four segments of the story was structured around an internal mystery in the classic “whodunit” style. Each of these internal mysteries had an unquestionable villain of that specific piece, and in every case both the mystery and the identity of the villain had been tidily wrapped up by the end of the book.

With OotP we rather abruptly found ourselves in different circumstances altogether, and the result was very uncomfortable. There was not a trace of the whodunit about that installment.

We knew who the villain was before cracking open the book. The puzzle wasn’t a question of finding the answer to some local mystery *du jour*, it was all wrapped up in the difficulty of getting reliable “news from the front”; figuring out what the hell was going on out in the wider world where there was noth-



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ing that the protagonist could do anything about.

And what I contend was probably going on wasn’t even confirmed at the end! Dumbledore and his Order were almost certainly running a scam wrapped around the archived record of the Trelawney Prophecy in order to flush Voldemort out of hiding where he could be seen by so many people that the Ministry would *have* to admit that he was back. Harry, with his direct connection to Voldemort was the side’s weak link and had to be kept, deliberately, in the dark in order to protect their mission.

And this still certainly *appears* to have been the case, but we never got a real confirmation.

There was no apparent or ultimately revealed ambiguity about who was on any side throughout the entire school year. (With the continuing exception of Severus Snape.) The lines were all drawn from the beginning and there were no surprises. And, once the initial Dementor attack in Little Whinging was thwarted and Harry had escaped being expelled from school, no one but Dolores Umbridge (and the press) appeared to take any further real interest in persecuting him. Harry had no legitimate part of any of Book 5’s *real* action. The real action wasn’t taking place at *Hogwarts*. Furthermore, in the three-way opposition between Dumbledore’s Order, the Death Eaters and the Ministry, it ultimately didn’t even matter whether or not Madam Umbridge was aware that she was furthering Voldemort’s aims.

Year 5 was Dumbledore’s year, not Harry’s, and Dumbledore was engaged in “belling the cat.” His objective was to knock the Ministry out of its position of denying Voldemort’s return. Harry wasn’t in a position to do anything about that year’s true





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agenda. So we were shunted off on the sidelines with him and got a tedious, miserable trip through the Tunnel of Adolescent Angst instead. With a side trip up the garden path courtesy of Lord Voldemort at the end of it. And, only at the very end of the year, as a sort of a bad conduct prize, Harry finally was filled in on the actual text of the stinking fish of doom, Trelawney's bloody first Prophecy.

— Once all the morass of deliberate obfuscation, smoke, and mirrors had served Dumbledore's purpose, and the Ministry had been forced to admit they were wrong and Voldemort is, indeed, back, that is. Not one minute before.

The whole book was the dreaded "transitional chapter" writ (very!) large. In spades.

And both HBP, and to a surprising extent, DHs, followed the same pattern.

Not to mention Book 5's function as the opening up of a whole new paradigm shift wherein it *looked* as if each of the last three books managed to echo and reflect major elements of one of the *first* three books. A paradigm which, however intriguing, Rowling abandoned before bringing it to completion.

By the end of OotP I was beginning to suspect that my instincts may have been, if not altogether wrong, certainly somewhat insufficient to the potential scope of this story.



The detective story is said to be probably one of the most inherently "moral" forms of storytelling in existence. Except under rare conditions a detective story simply does not work unless its wrongdoer is ultimately unmasked.

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He may be spared punishment at the discretion of the investigating parties. Justice in a whodunit is often tempered with mercy. And of course the wrongdoer also may already be dead by the time the truth is revealed. But the truth must always *be* revealed — at least to the reader and the people undertaking the investigation. Those stories — and we've all run into a few of them if we read mysteries on anything like a regular basis — where the author tries to get all artistic or ironic and spins us a tale where either circumstances or human agency result in everyone being misled and the perpetrator is either misidentified (usually as someone conveniently dead at the end of the story) or the solution is still unknown to the investigating parties (although not to the reader) when the book finally ends, generally just feel wrong or somehow unfair to the situation.

From the standpoint of a detective adventure the whole action of Book 5 was utterly unsatisfactory. It's small wonder the whole book felt awkward and wrong-footed and uncomfortable. (Besides which; Madam Umbridge was so monumentally unpleasant that every time I encountered her I wanted to stop reading, and had to fight my way through a wall of resistance.)

So; what did this say about the future direction of the series? Had we now moved beyond the "age of mysteries"?

Well... I certainly *hoped* not. Being neither a theologian nor a mystic, but merely a rude mechanical, I would immeasurably prefer to be able to go on reading the adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord as a variety of detective story than to have to stop and dabble in theology and metaphysics. And there was still a fighting chance that I would be able to continue to do so.

For one thing, it seemed clear that once the Ministry and the



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Order were back on the same page, even if still not altogether in agreement, the action would undoubtedly shift back to Harry. And Harry had a lot of information that he still needed to go and find out.

But the overall focus of the mystery had changed from the clear, pure, form that it (and we) had enjoyed through books 1–4. It seemed unlikely that book 7 would much resemble a whodunit, either.

Even if for no better reason than that ever since the end of the 3-year summer the overriding question has been not so much “Whodunit?” as “What the hell just happened?”

Followed immediately by the question of; “And what does it all *signify*?”

If, at the end of the adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord Harry did not know *\*why\** the various people who contributed to the situation in which he had been placed, acted as they did, as well as *\*what\** they did, we would undoubtedly feel that Rowling had failed in her intent. Harry, and we, felt we needed the *full* story. And we needed to know what happened before we could decide what we were going to have to do about it.

Even if, in the end, what specifically happened bore little relation to what must now be done. It looked to be shaping up into one of those cases — and once again my biases as a mystery reader were showing — in which the villain *IS* the story. I was sure that once we finally fully understood Tom Riddle, we would know what we had to do about him. Otherwise we were just pulling rabbits out of hats.

And I was not convinced that we *did* know everything that

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we needed to know concerning Tom Riddle just yet.



But this was all still a mystery readers’ classic solution. And it was becoming ever more questionable whether — for all her undoubtable skills at mimicking the form — Rowling regarded herself as a mystery writer.

Given what Rowling’d had to say for herself, up to then, it was no stretch to accept that Rowling regards herself as a “moral” writer. (Although her interpretation of the term leaves a lot to be desired in the way of clarity.)

But — rather more to the point — in the, not all that distant, days before she discovered Philip Pullman and started being snotty about C.S. Lewis on general principles (not that one needs to have discovered Pullman in order to have issues with Lewis. I agree that Susan Pevensey was singularly ill-done-by on the part of her creator), she did, when pinned down to it, identify herself as a Christian writer.

And, as the Christians will assure you, *morality* is not *Christianity*.

That issue had cropped up quite a long time ago in the interview with the VANCOUVER SUN which was mentioned in the link above. At the time, Rowling answered the question of whether she herself is Christian with:

*“Yes, I am. Which seems to offend the religious right far worse than if I said I thought there was no God. Every time I’ve been asked if I believe in God, I’ve said yes, because I do, but no one ever really has gone any more deeply into it than that, and I have to say that does suit me, because*



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*if I talk too freely about that I think the intelligent reader, whether 10 or 60, will be able to guess what's coming in the books."*

So, with a view to the rest of the puzzle pieces that Rowling had turned over to us in the series at the end of Book 5, what are we to think of that statement?

Are we to think of that statement?

For a while there, it began to look very much as if we were not necessarily going to be able to work out the solution of this conundrum through pure logic and traditional deduction. However useful those qualities may be in helping to determine the extent of the problem.

But, given the general motif of repeated reversals of carefully-built assumptions to which Rowling subjected us, and continued to subject us to through HBP, I was no longer quite sure what to think. For, with HBP, Rowling suddenly dragged us off on a tangent in which she appeared to completely dismiss most of what she had made such a point of drawing our attention to over the course of OotP.

I was finally beginning to entertain the concept that whereas OotP was a jolt of one kind, HBP was deliberately another. That in each of these novels Rowling may have intentionally introduced only one half of the problem, intending for the two to collide in the final book.

At that point, such a concept itself was only a bare hypothesis. But it did at least seem to be a possibility.

Left to my druthers, I do not go digging for esoteric symbolism, "deep meanings" or "eternal truths" in my adventure fiction. I will usually try to work out the probable future directions

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of a story arc from a starting point of following and extrapolating from the currently apparent patterns inside the narrative.

And given that a double handful of dominoes had toppled between two previous revisions of this collection, it was beginning to look as though I might be able to go back to doing it. Book 5 closely replayed the underlying plot of Book 1, and Book 6 had a veritable *swarm* of motifs in common with Book 2. Book 7 definitely appeared to be being set up to echo and reflect Book 3. And there was a recognizable *pattern* to Book 3.

But, still, I thought that Rowling must have had a reason for leading us off in the direction that we were led over the course of OotP, even though she might appear to have completely dismissed it for the whole of HBP. I was just not convinced that we could safely dismiss what we picked up from Book 5, as little as most of it still appeared to even be relevant in the wake of Book 6.



Well, rather than getting mired in the issues introduced in HBP, let's take a closer look at a few of the hints that we were handed at the end of OotP and try to figure out just what kind of tools we'd been given to work with at that point.

We were presented with a number of what at the time appeared to be great, thumping potential plot elements at the very end of Book 5, in addition to the full text of the Trelawney Prophecy.

The first of these was Dumbledore propounding on the Mysterious Power kept behind the locked door in the Department of Mysteries; the same door that effectively ate the pocket knife/



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key that Sirius Black had given Harry for Christmas the year of the TriWizard Tournament. The nature of these pronouncements make it altogether too difficult to conclude that this mysterious force is anything other than the Power of Love™. And as such this exchange becomes yet another incidence of Dumbledore's repeated assertions that Harry was saved because of his mother's Sacrificial Love; that to have been touched by such Love has marked him as surely as Voldemort's curse ever did, and that this is, in fact, the Power Harry has which the Dark Lord knows not.

Except that... Harry really does not come across in the books as a particularly *loving* child.

In fact he comes across as "a very good hater."

Well, really, how could anyone expect him to be a particularly loving child, the way the Dursleys raised him? Under their care, what he learned was to withdraw into himself, to become self-contained, and, as much as possible, self-sufficient. Very much as Tom Riddle learned back in his orphanage.

And something in Harry has given him the inclination and resolve to *continue* to maintain this policy of self-containment even after he has moved beyond the Dursleys' sphere into a wider world in which he is hailed as a hero. Once out of the Dursleys' keeping, he could easily have lost his balance and become every bit as much of an attention-sponge as Rita Skeeter and her successors tried to paint him. Instead, he has maintained his barriers and opened himself up to very few people since his entry into the wizarding world, and we have seen him spontaneously reach out to virtually no one.

With the significant exception of Sirius Black, who some-

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how seems to have charmed his way right through all of Harry's defenses.

And, yes, Harry *does* seem to care about those few people to whom he *has* opened himself up. He has shown himself perfectly capable of honoring a friendship and of forming emotional connections to others. The Dursleys did not manage to destroy that. But he still doesn't seem to go in much for the "Anything, anything *at all*, for my *friends!*" routine. Otherwise he might have ended up in Hufflepuff and formed his trio with Justin and Ernie.

And he'll still shut any or all of his friends out in a blink whenever he is upset, or has been presented with a new viewpoint to absorb.

Even his fascination with anything that anyone will tell him about his father comes across as more from curiosity or self-absorption than it does of love. He does not *remember* James Potter enough to *love* him.

No, I would say that Harry is still effectively sailing under the black flag of "I am a rock, I am an island." and there was no shortage of examples in the text about which shoals plotting that particular course is likely to wreck you upon. Particularly that suspected example swooping about the landscape like an overgrown bat.



I think that even at that late point in the story arc to blindly accept Dumbledore's assurances on Harry Potter's command over the Power of Love™ at face value is to seriously anticipate something which has not yet been adequately demonstrated



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in the text. Dumbledore may not be often “wide of the mark,” acto Rowling, but he is not infallible. And if the power that Voldemort “knows not” is the fact of having been granted a magical protection from his enemy by his mother’s loving sacrifice, that is a power which we were already told will cease when he attains his majority.

Dumbledore did have at least one solid incident upon which to pin his hopes. One of the times that Harry got it absolutely right was in PoA when Peter abruptly threw him into the driver’s seat, and without thinking about it too much, even *knowing* that Peter is the one who had betrayed him and gotten his parents killed, Harry chose not to take the responsibility of exacting revenge upon Peter himself. Albus harped on that string ever afterward. And it was probably the most hopeful sign we’d been given in the whole series that Rowling actually intended to deliver upon the highly touchy issues she seems to have set up.

I rather suspected that this might prove to be one of those aforementioned difficult life lessons that Harry was going to have to master before he would be ready for the final confrontation with his enemy. Probably the greatest of all of them. At the end of HBP his grasp on the principle was still entirely theoretical. And while he may have sorted out an intellectual understanding of what Dumbledore was driving at — that there are things *worth* dying for; by that point, his grasp upon the whole issue still seemed singularly muzzy-headed and self-contradictory.

...Although Harry’s ability to summon a Patronus at the age of 13 might be more significant than I had been willing to credit. We might need to keep that in mind, as well.

I did at least imagine that we should try to feel confident that

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he *would* ultimately learn this lesson. Even if only at the last moment, in the course of the series’s climax itself. But it was not as easy as it ought to have been.



However, once one considers it, the Power behind the locked door sounds rather like a Patronus taken to the Nth degree, doesn’t it?

Which suggested that it might finally be appropriate to raise the question of why the door in the Department of Mysteries which continues to contain this “greatest Mystery,” and which from Dumbledore’s description would appear to be restraining no less than the Power of Love™ itself, is kept locked in the first place.

We still have no idea, and frankly, Rowling’s interview description of the Power contained there was an epic failure (a fountain of *Amortentia*?! Really? That stuff doesn’t even produce an authentic emotion. Even *Slughorn* can tell us that much.).

After that piece of frankly insulting twaddle, I think we will be much better off trying to hammer out our own explanations on the subject, *thank you*.

But still, wizards are certainly a no less sentimental lot than Muggles. They also appear to be no less motivated by their attachments to one another. Human attachments and family ties seem on prominent display in every direction you look in the ww. The wizarding world clearly *values* such attachments.

So why lock the door?

And once the question has finally been raised, it occurred to me that perhaps the door was originally locked *by treaty*.

Could the Dementors have been paid off by giving them Azkaban fortress, a steady supply of authorized victims, and an agree-



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ment to keep the door locked?

If so, perhaps it was past time that someone pointed it out that the creatures with whom the ww established that treaty have broken their side of the agreement!



A second heavy-handed hint we were given was Luna Lovegood's confident assertion that "They're all still there, just beyond the Veil." Luna Lovegood has the gift of being able to state her convictions with such absolute confidence that she will convince anyone who is willing to be convinced of them. Unfortunately for Luna, very few people are willing to be convinced of the existence of the Crumple-Horned Snorkack, Cornelius Fudge's private army of heliopaths, or the rotfang conspiracy.

Rather a lot of people, however, are perfectly willing to be convinced that those that they have loved and lost still exist, as themselves, somewhere just beyond a mysterious Veil. Virtually every organized religion in the world has something in common with that very premise.

So. On the one hand we have the Veil, behind which linger all of our beloved dead, and on the other we have the mysterious Power behind door #3. And I was convinced that neither one of these elements was going to go away, despite Rowling's determination to spend the whole of Book 6 ignoring them.

At the time, I thought that it was seriously unlikely that Rowling would have made such a point of giving us such blatant hints about these two potential plot elements unless these were elements that she intended to make further use of. And, indeed, it felt unwise to fully dismiss them even after reading



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to the end of HBP, despite the fact that *she* seemed to have done so. Rowling may indeed have (and in retrospect appears to *have* indeed) intended both as disposable plot devices, or empty pronouncements in the attempt to appear profound, yet are without substance, but they seemed to have taken on a significance greater than she was willing to grant them.

If nothing else, at that point (Easter 2005) it strongly suggested that a return to the DoM was in order.

Of course, by that time we had also expended rather a lot of theorizing on a comment of Dumbledore's in the opening chapter of PS/SS which implied that some sort of major paradigm-shifting event had taken place in the wizarding world 11 years before the defeat of Lord Voldemort at Godric's Hollow, as well. Ultimately to no purpose.

For that matter, the very nature of the concepts we had suddenly been handed to juggle — articles of Faith and the power of Love — do not sound very much like relevant issues pursuant to such a secular, in fact, such a purely *political* problem as the rooting out and shutting down of a few dozen Death Eaters. The Death Eaters are a purely human problem. We already know where the Death Eaters are coming from, and bringing such ammunition to bear on them is an exercise in swatting a fly with a Buick. The DMLE is perfectly capable of hunting out and shutting down Death Eaters, *if* they'll get off their arses and do it. Or if the MoM will get out of their way and *let* them.

But to all appearances, that caliber of ammo *was* likely to be necessary for shutting down their Leader.





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We were given yet a third piece of information in the aftermath of the raid on the DoM as well. And I am still not sure just where that one was supposed to fit. Or if it even does fit. This third maybe-clue was Nearly Headless Nick's explanation of what makes a ghost.

To be honest, I don't know just how this information ultimately relates to the conundrum of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord, but I suspected back then that it did indeed relate. The relevance of the connection was just a good deal less obvious than that of the locked door or the Veil.

Originally, I suspected that it might have something to do with the nature of wizards' souls. Nick assures us that only wizards (and, of course, witches) are capable of manifesting as ghosts. Ergo; wizards are the only humans who are psychically active enough to sustain an existence without the grounding of a physical body.

We'd already had ample demonstration of this premise throughout the series.

And, if nothing else, this alone served as a blindingly clear illustration of the fact that for all his power and alleged brilliance, the former Tom Riddle is fundamentally most unwise. For his soul; that powerful, resilient, indestructible wizard's soul, was *already* immortal. And he has hacked it to pieces and strewn the pieces to the four winds in an attempt to preserve its anchor to the material plane. Such folly exceeds all bounds.

According to Nick, the imprint of those souls which cannot face the prospect of the unknown, linger on this side of the Veil, unhappily, as ghosts.

He implies that this is the *only* reason they linger. But I am

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inclined to doubt that suggestion very much. For all that it is undoubtedly *his* reason.

For one thing, we also have the example of Professor Binns, who I suspect is not altogether aware that he is even dead. And even if he is, he is incapable of imagining any existence apart from telling an unending succession of schoolchildren about the Goblin wars.

For that matter, we also have the example of Moaning Myrtle who clearly refuses to let go of a grudge against the girls who cruelly amused themselves by tormenting her, and when balked of her determination to haunt them personally, by the Ministry, she returned to Hogwarts to make as many other people feel as badly as she possibly could.

One thing that Rowling subtly slips into Nick's testimony, however, is the information that, presumably, any witch or wizard in the Potterverse gets a *choice* in the matter. I thought there might yet be a payoff on this issue.

We have also never been informed regarding the ultimate fate of those who face the unknown beyond the Veil in the light of "an awfully big adventure." Nor is there anyone in the Potterverse truly qualified to tell us what awaits such resilient souls on the other side of the great divide, or whether such souls are so indestructible as to make a practice of returning. (And, ultimately, although the Resurrection Stone will call them back for questioning it remains unclear what actually awaits one on the other side, because no one thinks to ask.)

On this issue I will absolutely not commit myself either way. But I will say that I have seen no indication in the text, which would suggest that reincarnation is a relevant factor in the Pot-



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terverse. No indication at all. Indeed, this is a somewhat curious absence, all things considering.

I cannot count upon having assigned Nick's information into the proper category, either. But I did suspect that somewhere there must *be* a proper category. (At the very least it is additional circumstantial evidence that Lord Voldemort is determined never to die because he is afraid to.)

In the event, however, I appear to have turned out to be determinedly looking in the wrong direction.



So. What did we have — or think that we had — that we knew about — so far?

**Item:** as far back as Prisoner of Azkaban we were handed a strong wake-up call that, in the Potterverse, souls *matter*. We were all given a horrible demonstration of this fact at the end of GoF. This had even already been hinted at as early as the end of PS/SS. The cumulative message is that entering into the service of Lord Voldemort is likely to cost you your soul. Literally.

Later, in HBP we got an up close and personal examination of Lord Voldemort's present condition framed as a literal example of spiritual disintegration.

**Item:** in the Chamber of Secrets Harry Potter demonstrated himself both worthy and capable of wielding the Sword of Courage. We also saw that in the Potterverse, Faith seems to provide tangible assistance to those that will profess it.

In CoS we were also given our only on-stage demonstration of actually destroying a Horcrux. Even though the Diary Revnant had nearly managed to free itself from the book; render-

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ing the book unable to contain it banished the soul fragment altogether, returning all of the life force that it had stolen to its proper owner.

**Item:** we have been hit over the head from the beginning of the whole series with the message that Love can *save* you.

Souls. Courage, Faith, Love, and Salvation, in the place of the Mysteries. What does that add up to, to you?

For me, at the end of OotP, that added up to a "spirit quest."



For all that such spirit quests are a traditional part of a "Hero's Journey," at the end of HBP I was no longer confident that we would get one.

It never was a done-deal, of course. Plus, we'd already been tacitly set the problem of a physical quest to have to work our way through over the course of Book 7. The spirit quest that I thought I foresaw at the end of OotP may just have become literal.

And neither quest seemed likely to take place upon the "playing fields of Hogwarts." Although it did seem likely that we would be paying at least one visit to the school over the course of the last book. I thought we would be sneaking in while the school itself was closed.

I had thought that the possibility of being sent on a spirit quest might shed a bit of light on Rowling's insistence that she "had" to kill Sirius Black when she did. In most classic spirit quests a guide is provided. This guide is always someone that the quester once knew, usually someone dear to the quester, and someone who has already passed beyond death. Harry does not really remember his parents. And he never quite man-



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aged to open up enough to be able to claim a true friendship with Cedric Diggory. At the end of OotP, Who did that leave?

I went a little further out on this particular limb and stated that, with this in mind, one of the other difficult life lessons that Harry would *\*have\** to learn before the final confrontation, is that Death, which to the end of OotP was portrayed in the series as uniformly unfair, random, and arbitrary, can be made to *\*count\** for something. And unlike the value of Love which he may only come to understand at the 11th hour, this is a lesson that he will need to have learned *\*before\** the final confrontation with Voldemort.

Which meant he had to learn it between then, and the end of Book 7. Up to that point the only death that had unmistakably counted for anything in the entire series had been Lily Potter's. And we were not there to see it, Harry was allegedly not watching, and was far too young to understand, anyway. Even the multiple undercurrents and exchanges attendant upon the death of Albus Dumbledore did not register with Harry, who saw only a trust abused.

Back at the end of the 5th book, Harry was still ignoring any implications of his mother's sacrifice. For that matter, he was not just ignoring his mother's death. He was largely ignoring her life as well.

It took until his 5th year trip into Snape's worst memory before he even asked his first question related to his *mother*, and he was easily fobbed off with a half-answer, and some more stories of his father. All of his attention was, and remained, focused on his father. It was only with Year 6 and Professor Slughorn's glowing and continual accolades of Lily that Harry

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finally had to take note of being his mother's son as well as James's. And he *still* didn't take sufficient notice of it to satisfy the readers who had been impatiently waiting for the other shoe to fall ever since PoA.

We didn't hang about Privet Drive long enough for him to start asking questions about Lily in year 6. Nor would it have occurred to Harry to do so at that point. And we were extremely frustrated when Petunia continued to keep silence at the opening of year 7, and then disappeared from the story with her secrets yet untold.

I did think it would be a fine piece of irony if the death that finally counted enough for Harry to learn the lesson that a death can be an item of negotiable exchange should turn out to be Pettigrew's. But I wasn't going to stick my neck out far enough to predict *that*. Which turned out to be just as well. At that moment, it seemed far more likely to turn up to be something related to the death of Albus Dumbledore. We still were missing all sorts of information related to just what was going on there.

But; I suspected Harry would have learned that lesson before he came face to face with Voldemort for the last time. On this side of the Veil.

In the kind of story that this series was still pretending to be, such issues are not negotiable.



Which brings us to the subject of choices. Rowling expends a lot of rhetoric on the importance of one's choices, but almost nothing in the series ever actually follows through on what is



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claimed about them. In the end this pretense all boils down to another piece of fakery.

Frankly, as things stood by the time I was working on the first iteration of this essay, nobody in the whole series apart from Snape (and Pettigrew), and Lily Potter gave any appearance of ever having had any real choices at all. Every other character in the series has been shown to have been locked into their roles by choices which were made for them, by their families, usually before they were born, and they had little or nothing to say in the matter.

Just about all characters in the series seemed to be entirely defined by their families, regardless of whether they marched in lock-step in accordance with their family's decisions, or rejected them utterly. And two of the three characters that we had been shown who did reject their families' alliances had been brought to extremely sticky ends, so the underlying message had hardly presented that particular choice as a desirable option.

Even the children without *living* families appeared to be locked into the contract made by the choices of their deceased parents. Only children with irrelevant families, such as Hermione Granger, or the other Muggle-borns, seemed to have the luxury of making their own choices, at least in this generation.

Or, as in the case of Tom Riddle, seemed to have been turned loose on the world *incapable* of ever making proper choices.



As I say, both here AND in the essay entitled "Redeeming the Potterverse," and probably a few other places; I am not a theologian. I do not go searching for Christ figures in children's

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(or anyone else's) literature. But it looked an awful lot to me as if Rowling may have handed us one after all. And at that point in the story it was not Harry Potter. At that point in the story Harry was standing squarely in the position of the soul in need of salvation. A salvation which, in accordance with all conventional Christian doctrine, had already been provided, and now must be embraced.

And, in a very real sense, so was Tom Riddle. Although he would strenuously deny it. And I could not hold out much confidence that he was even capable of understanding the concept.

As he had been set up in canon, Riddle never really had a chance. Rowling admitted in at least one interview before HBP was released that he was not *born* evil. But she also stated that he cannot have ever really loved anyone, or he would not be what he is today. The only sort of person for whom this can accurately be said is a sociopath. But, by casting her villain as a sociopath Rowling had reduced him to a condition, not a person. And that threw her presumed message of making the right *choices* seriously off-kilter.

An infant simply does not consciously choose whether or not he is going to form an attachment to its caretakers. He just does so. This is the first step of all human interactions and it is virtually a biological imperative. It simply *happens*.

— Unless that infant is somehow *prevented* from taking that step.

Rowling has also been quoted as stating her belief that children are usually good, unless they have been damaged. Clearly if what Rowling tells us of Riddle above is literally true; then even though she went out of her way to paint Tom Riddle as a bad seed from a degenerate tree; there had to have been some-



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thing in Tom Riddle's earliest experience which prevented him from ever having the faith and confidence necessary to form a connection with the people who were responsible for his welfare. This damage would have taken place at so early an age that it is not something he can properly be held to be responsible for *choosing*.

And the statement that no one had ever loved Tom Riddle is begging the question, too. Love does not have to be reciprocated in order to *exist*. A child is capable of loving, or at least trusting and depending upon, his caretaker even if the caretaker does not particularly love him. I'm sure that 15-month-old Harry trusted his aunt Petunia to feed and tend him, even if she didn't do it with anything resembling the same enthusiasm or consistency as his mother.

But, having been denied the experience of bonding with any other person, at the point that it was essential to his future development to do so, Tom became incapable of ever living what anyone could recognize as a normal human life. Tom Riddle must answer for his own actions, certainly. But it sounds as if he was set loose into the world unequipped to make proper *choices*.

If the soul is the seat of the emotions, then Tom Riddle was emotionally crippled well before reaching an age of accountability. Therefore; is it really an *appropriate* illustration of Divine Justice to destroy this — already damaged — soul for the virtually inevitable results of developing a fundamental defect over which it had no control and *no choice*? A defect so fundamental as to render him *incapable* of comprehending the true meaning or purpose of any human social contract? Is the damage to such a soul irreparable? Is there no possibility of healing?



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Do wizard's souls return from behind the Veil?

The only thing that could conceivably have saved Tom Riddle would have been to get him out of that environment and into one where he could learn that basic first step of human relationships, to bond with his caretakers, before it was too late. That did not happen. Tom Riddle never learned to trust, love, or to depend upon any other creature. And if no one ever loved the infant Tom Riddle it was not because he didn't *deserve* it.

If the projection earlier in this piece regarding the possible effects upon a child's early emotional development of 3rd-party tampering by Dementors is anywhere on target, it suggests that while wizarding sociopaths are probably virtually unknown, such a pathology may not be as uncommon among Potterverse Muggles as it is among us in our own parallel reality. I doubt that the Dementors' periodic sweep of the Muggle world in search of infant wizards is without collateral damage upon the children of Muggles.



And, at this point, we also have to stop short and wonder about the degree to which life imitates art. And vice-versa. Early in this century JK Rowling was deeply involved in children's charities. Her part in the formation of the Children's Voice is an issue so closely related to the picture of the young Tom Riddle to which we were treated in HBP that it would seem that a few questions are in order.

The Children's Voice (formerly the Children's High-Level Group) is primarily concerned with the abuse of children in institutions in Eastern Europe. It is most specifically concerned





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with the use of what are known as “cage beds.” Children raised under such conditions are documented to frequently develop “attachment issues,” as well as being at enhanced risk for many other psychological pathologies and a failure to thrive.

Rowling has stated that she read the article which set her onto this crusade in 2003. OotP was released in July of 2003. The manuscript had been turned in to the publishers at the end of 2002.

Before Rowling encountered the article. Before the article had been published.

Rowling laid out her master Plan for the series in the 1990s. While I suspect that she made some modifications to the original version of her Plan, she claimed she had not departed greatly from it. We were always scheduled to be filled in on the official Riddle backstory in Book 6.

Tom Riddle was not raised in Eastern Europe. British orphanages have not ever (so far as I know) adopted the use of cage beds. And Harry could see that while Tom’s orphanage was a grim place to grow up, the children in it were not being obviously abused.

But one still really does have to ask oneself whether the original Riddle backstory was quite what we were finally given in HBP.



The purely human and political problem of the Death Eaters, however, is one that could probably be safely left in the hands of the Ministry. I was sure that Harry would not be called upon in Book 7 to lead troops of Aurors to fend off platoons of Death Eaters. And I was not convinced that this battle would

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be fought upon the playing fields of Hogwarts, either. (To the ruin of the predictions of countless fanfics.) In this last instance I was, of course, wrong.

But the matter of that projected spirit quest, if it came off, was something that seemed unlikely to be deployed at any point in the series prior to the final confrontation between Harry and Voldemort. Unlikely, but not completely impossible. Harry’d had several apparent out-of-body experiences to that point in the series, mostly in the form of dreams, and if he had another in Book 7 I would not be unduly astonished (and wasn’t, although the explanation for these was highly unsatisfactory). But this, or these, would not constitute the series’s great spirit quest.

We had already been given the loud-and-clear message that the final book of this series of school stories would not be taking place at school at all; that Harry and his friends would drop out of school and undertake a real quest in search of the missing Horcruxes. I suspected that this was a strong hint that the school would remain closed throughout the final book, and when Harry returned there (which we all suspected he must), he would do so unofficially and in secret. Harry, after all, cannot be blamed for dropping out of school if the school is not open.

If a spirit quest also took place — and I was still half-way convinced that one might take place, although far less convinced than I had been at the end of OotP — I suspected that it would comprise the series’s final battle, and it could be brought about, or be conducted, in any number of ways. But if Rowling did not decide to simply set tradition on its head, certain constant factors would probably apply. Most of these were no-brainers



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to anyone familiar with the conventions of fantasy adventures. And most of them hold just as well even if there wasn't a spirit quest in the offing.

For there would certainly be a final confrontation..

- 1 By the time Harry faced Voldemort, he would no longer have the benefit of the wise counselor figure represented by Albus Dumbledore. Whether Dumbledore's current removal was total, or whether we would have one more debriefing session in which Dumbledore — in whatever iteration — Explains It All did not matter. He wouldn't be available to Harry when Harry needed him. Rowling had already made statements to this effect.
- 2 When Harry finally faced Voldemort he would probably face him alone, without his friends to support him. He always has. Voldemort will almost certainly be alone as well. Even the cover art for the US edition of the book suggested as much. (The US covers, ever since GoF, had a very good track record of always depicting a scene that is actually in the book. Even though up to this point they had always depicted one from the run up to the climax, rather than the climax itself.)

Or, alternately, if the cover art depicts an abortive confrontation during the run-up to the climax, in the artist's usual manner, there's an outside chance that JKR may decide to play The Magic Flute and send Ron and Hermione into the fray with Harry at the end. I wasn't not going to try to anticipate the ramifications of that. And the cover illustration we had argued pretty strongly against it. But it seemed likely that IF Ron and



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Hermione make it to the showdown, then Voldemort will probably have someone to give him support as well. Possibly Bellatrix and/or Pettigrew. And Snape would be lurking somewhere in the equation.

This confrontation would probably be the point of departure for the spirit quest, if there is one. It was unknown whether Ron and Hermione would also accompany Harry on the spirit quest leg of the proceedings. My gut feeling was that they would not. But I'd certainly been wrong before and, as I say, there might not even BE a spirit quest.

- 3 By the time Harry faced Voldemort he would no longer fear Death in itself. This is the one point upon which Voldemort and Harry most differ.

Is there anyone, anyone at all who questions the reading that just about every action that has ever been taken by Lord Voldemort has been dictated by a horror of Death? In his first life, Tom Riddle threw away everything; honor, friendship, justice, humanity, good looks, even the welfare of his own soul in an attempt to avoid Death.

Nor is it at all difficult to see where this crippling fear might have come from; not if my postulation above is correct, and that the Dementors attempt to create future Dark Lords in the cradle.

If a tiny child keeps catching glimpses of a horrifying, faceless, 12-foot tall, black-hooded figure with rotting skeletal hands — that no one else can see — looming in the shadows of the nursery and \*following him around,\* and he is alone among Muggles with only Muggle sym-





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bolism and Muggle superstition to reason from, what is he going to conclude that he is seeing?

And even after these visitations have withdrawn, these earliest impressions will hang on long after the actual recollections have dimmed and been overwritten by later experience. Even after he has entered the wizarding world and discovered the existence of a whole race of Beings which resemble the creatures of his childhood nightmares.

Harry might be afraid of failing, he might be afraid of dying in vain, but he would not be so cripplingly afraid to die.

- 4 Given the solidly established motifs of the Veil and the Locked Door, there seemed a good chance that this final confrontation would take place in the Department of Mysteries. Particularly if Rowling did intend to invoke that Locked Door.

From that point on it was up to Rowling. There was no shortage of different directions in which she could choose to take it.



With no further ado, I am now going to repeat a somewhat modified extrapolation of what had, in 2005, seemed to be a possible direction for the series's resolution. It's rather along the line of; "Captain Obvious presents," but there you have it.

There are a few modifications in view of the revelations of HBP. It does not take account of DHs.

This is not the original version, either. That one formerly existed as; 'The Premature Prediction' and it was indeed both

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premature, and ultimately wrong.

An attempt to restore the *original* version, which was developed back when I still thought Rowling meant what she said about Christianity, has been spun off into the article entitled 'Redeeming the Potterverse', which is posted over in The 7th Son sub-collection. It's very similar to this, but not *quite* the same.

Okay. So:

Since Harry has never been instructed on how to destroy a Horcrux without activating any curses which might be protecting it, the safest method would seem to be to simply pitch the damn thing through the Veil. To do that, you need to take it to the room of the Veil in the Department of Mysteries. Harry and his friends hit upon this solution and, bearing whichever Horcrux(es) or suspected Horcruxes that they have managed to locate set off for London, secure in the assumption that the only one left is Nagini. Anyone is welcome to kill Nagini.

Somehow either Voldemort gets wind of this, or tossing bits of his soul through the Veil ahead of schedule draws the remainder of it to the scene after them.

In any case, he shows up after the portable Horcruxes have been eliminated, but, unlike Harry, Tom already knows that the final Horcrux is not Nagini.

Voldemort may even have figured out by then that the last one is Harry.

If Voldemort's wand is the mystery Horcrux, it is taken out of commission in the confrontation. Probably by Pettigrew. Who is killed in the process. (This possibility is explored in a couple of the Pettigrew articles. Pettigrew does owe Harry.)

Voldemort — knowing that if Harry dies, he will have lost



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his last Horcrux — offers a bargain. (Or, conversely, he has decided to write that one off.)

In any case, Tom taunts Harry with the fact that he cannot kill him without dying himself, confident that Harry is as terrified to die as he is.

Harry throws himself through the Veil, physically dragging Tom through as well, in order to take his enemy down with him, and to make his death count for something. Thus embarking on his spirit quest.

If Rowling decides to use Harry's earlier performance with Pensieves as foreshadowing, he will not fall all the way through the archway and his friends will be able to pull him physically back through the Veil itself. He will be deeply comatose, but not actually dead, and they are unable to wake him.



Sirius Black, either as man or dog is waiting for him beyond the Veil and serves as his guide. In the spirit realm the Voldemort entity exists independently, probably in VaporMort form. It cannot retreat back through the Veil to the physical world, since all of the Horcruxes have either been destroyed or have preceded it through the Veil. (Someone must have killed the snake.) Enraged, it tracks Harry's progress and settles down to hunt him.

Harry will certainly meet his father on this quest, James will be of some help, and may be able to give Harry some needed information, but he will not be able to rid Harry of the entity which is hunting him. He will send them in search of Lily, who is the one who defeated Voldemort before. As Harry and Sirius travel

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on, Harry will eventually have to start questioning how and why Voldemort is still hunting him when both of them are \*dead\*:

Harry may encounter others who have died in the war by that time, (Dumbledore? Pettigrew? Quirrell — who may well thank Harry for delivering him from bondage?) but this part of the sequence will not be drawn out unduly.

Ultimately they will make their way to Lily, and Harry will at long last have to face up to, and fully understand, and finally accept — instead of just take for granted — the love that saved him. And has *gone on* saving him. And ultimately will *continue* to save him.

During a final attack, Lily's lesson will finally come into play, confrontation will become transformation, the final soul fragment of Tom's will finally become disentangled from Harry and there will be nothing left to link the Voldemort entity to him. The Voldemort entity, now as complete as it ever will be will be drawn away from Harry to face whatever passes for judgment. There will be pyrotechnics of some sort.

Towards the end of this resolution, overwhelmed by the power of the transformation, disoriented by the separation from his other soul, and blinded by the light that surrounds him, Harry stumbles through a door into a mercifully dim hallway that looks familiar.

It was only locked from the other side.

(Those rooms in the DoM are a right warren, all running into one another behind the scenes.)

...Thereby bringing with him/releasing The Power to permanently rid the Potterverse of the Dementors. Which it does, quite handily.



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If Harry's body was recovered from the archway, he now wakes.

To a shaken *and* stirred wizarding world, all of whom — the narrow and the broad-minded together — are now left in the position of having to pick up the pieces and try to hammer out a society which is NOT ruled by fear, and create a justice system that isn't a disgrace to the name. In the aftermath, they may even finally manage to bring themselves to fully enfranchise the Goblins and possibly even consider Nationalizing Elf Service as an intermediate step in enfranchising the House Elves. Eventually, when they've had another hundred years or so to observe the results, the Centaurs and Merrows may even be willing to open up negotiations with them.

We might as well underline the message by having Harry's quest take exactly three days and three nights.

The portion of Tom Riddle's soul which had believed itself to be a part of Harry remains behind in the spirit realm, perhaps to serve out a term of reparation or atonement in hope of a more appropriate resurrection one day. And so does Sirius Black, who would also rather take the chance of a whole new life someday than to attempt to return to the one which he made such a monumental botch of. Particularly given that any friends of his still among the living have all moved on without him.



Well. It did read. And it covered just about everything except the mysterious "gleam" and how that related to the creation of Voldemort's simulacrum, and the still questionable significance of Harry having his mother's green eyes.

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Did I truly think that it would end this way? Well, no, I'll admit I didn't. Not by the time I got to end of HBP, anyway. Too many dominoes had toppled since the release of HBP for me to have much expectation of Rowling giving us anything like that — although if we did get a spirit quest, I would be a little surprised if I got *everything* wrong — But I rather suspected that while those four basic checklist items regarding the final confrontation were probably sound enough, I wouldn't have given you very long odds on any of the rest being deployed by Rowling.

Alternately; perhaps we were supposed to discover that the Dementors aren't quite as evil as they've been painted and one of them will relieve Harry of the sixth Horcrux without taking his own soul as well. But I doubted that even more.

Or, most probably, we would just have to forget about the whole "spiritual truths," woo-woo scenario, and just play the whole thing out, literally, in the material world

For one thing, it seemed that although her interview in New York in August of 2006 would tend to suggest otherwise, Rowling may have fully intended to have Harry die in order to take down his enemy. In which case Ron and Hermione may well have already perished in the destruction of the Horcruxes. Leaving Harry in the position of having sacrificed everything already by the time he meets Voldemort face to face for the last time — so the final sacrifice wouldn't seem so great a stretch. Everything else he cared deeply about having already passed beyond that Veil. He takes the last two Horcruxes through the Veil with him. But I was inclined to doubt that play script, too, by then.

For one thing it is hard to see how anything like that scenario



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could manage to tie off the dangling end of Harry's dealings with Severus Snape. And we just plain weren't going to go get out of this series without doing that. At least in some form.



Speaking of whom: I'd also abruptly realized that the fans, particularly those of the highly Christian persuasion, harping so determinedly on the "redemption card" as regards Snape's role in the overall story arc were probably leading themselves up a blind alley.

It isn't that people in this series needed to *redeem* themselves, it's that they needed to *\*forgive\** the people who have wronged them. ("...and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and ... deliver us from evil.")

Indeed, acto basic Christian doctrine, human beings, having been born subject to original sin, are simply not qualified to redeem *themselves*. They have to get it through their thick heads that *they* cannot do it, it has been done *for* them, it *isn't* going to be done again, and that they are pwned. Accept it. Or not. There is one package deal on offer, and it is the *only* deal on offer. Either buy the package, the *whole* package, or there is no deal. The kingdom of heaven is not a representational democracy, and you cannot "have it your way." No negotiations, no substitutions, no excuses. Amen.

Ergo: Snape *can't* redeem himself. We shouldn't be expecting him to. But he can learn to forgive people for wronging him. And if he is ever to come into his own, he needs to.

Severus Snape has a lot to forgive.

As does just about everyone else in this whole cast of dozens,



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really. Every direction you look you see people who won't forgive this, or who won't forgive that, or who won't forgive the other, starting with Petunia Dursley all down through the series, and Harry has fallen right into lockstep with all of them. And they are *all* wrong.

And I was beginning to suspect that this is going to be the punchline of Rowling's entire message as it regards choices. To forgive is a choice that you can make without it ever being formally *offered*.



And, in the end, I gave Rowling way too much credit.

But I'll have to admit that in the main, I really do prefer to take my Book of Revelations over coffee and brandy all round in the library in the final chapter. After the police have departed with whoever it was that "dunnit" safely in custody.



The following exchange kicked off a day or two after a pre-DHs iteration of the above was posted (June 2007) and, frankly, I don't think that any reworking on my own part would improve it. It is a 3-way e-mail exchange between myself and two of my fellow-conspirators, Professor\_Mum and Swythyv, as we push this train a little farther down the track:

.....

[Professor\_Mum]

I read your revised Premature Prediction essay and it's bloody brilliant. It gave me a little charge of the inspiration that I've sorely lacked lately.





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While it is outlandish on its face... your theory, from my perspective, is probably true, at least to some extent

Orphan Tom somehow gets selected/marked by the Dementors — maybe as a baby. Or, it may have been when he discovered the Cave as a youth, but I like how you pointed out that the Gaunt Hovel has all the markings of the place Dementors love best.

You made me realize: Dementors aren't Predators, they are Parasites. It is in a parasite's best interest to keep a supply of hosts available for feeding and it is not in their best interest to exterminate them all. Even the name "Death Eater" is a virtual synonym for parasite. The DE uniform apes the Dementor's appearance.

We don't have any examples of Dementor's dying, but you are right — they breed, they likely die as well. Perhaps they are using Tom to upgrade their species — a little evolution. The misty fog in HBP which infiltrates the ww impacts the Muggle one as well.

Just as Child Lupin was marked as a Dark Creature, but it wasn't his fault — Jo has apparently wiggled out of the Bad Seed angle by having Voldemort's evilness be due to a bite or something slightly out of his control. He has the genetic predisposition to go bad, and he's marked (?) for some evil breeding program.

No wonder the Dementors were so interested in Harry on the train in PoA — they sensed their Breeding Overlord in the compartment (Ginny was strongly effected too, btw). I sense a PoA/DHs parallel... don't you?

And the fact that Dementors have a role — guarding Azkaban — means that they are also involved, to some extent, with the MoM. If they got a gander at the "Hogwarts Book of Newborns" they might see that there was a baby with a connection to the Gaunt Hovel born to the Slytherin-heir woman



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they could have been seeking. Perhaps as a result of finding out that the Dementors were browsing that very specific book, Dumbledore looked up the boy they were most interested in, came back to school, and immediately hid all the Playboys, er, Horcrux books, in the attic. Who know what trouble a boy, influenced by soul sucking dementors, might get into? It must have really chaffed his ass when Fudge let them on the grounds.

Recall this: bad blood will out... if there is something wrong with the bitch, there is something wrong with the pup. That is one explanation... Merope's depression and maybe her blood status as Slytherin's heir attracted the Dementors. This point made me think of an earlier essay of yours regarding the Knights of Walpurgis. A group has marked Tom to pursue their narrow agenda.

And maybe Tom didn't really fear death until he got involved with these parasites... and that's when his immortality journey took a perverse twist... he'd do anything to avoid become a Dementor's mental meal.

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[Me]

Hey, thanks. I was pretty chuffed with this one when it first went up just before HBP came out. I was a bit miffed when it got immediately canon-shafted, although it didn't get completely shafted, just the more overtly Christian components did.

The Dementors as parasites. Yup. I never quite came out and said that but I suspect that I really ought to. I'm no longer convinced that some clever arsehole didn't create them back when Seclusion was being drafted out specifically to guard the prison. We've got no hint of their being something that's been around since prehistory. Possibly they were developed from Boggarts,





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which seem to work in something like the same way.

Getting hold of the Hogwarts enrollment list wouldn't do them any good. They are blind, remember? They wouldn't be able to read it. That's one of the reasons they need Tom.

I don't think they give squat for House affiliations, either, and Slytherin means absolutely zip to them. The whole Slytherin thread is just buying into Tom's delusions. And they don't care how much of a whackjob Tom is, so long as he smooths the way for them.

Oh lord. I've been harping on Book 7 = Book 3 like a mad bard for the past 2.5 years. Of course I sense a PoA/DHs parallel.

Yeah, most of the components of the old Tom Riddle and the Knights of Walpurgis essay now lives in the collection of exploded theories. It's kind of odd how the two parallel theories segued into one another. The 2nd cropped up just before the first was finally sunk beyond all recovery. But the thing they have in common is that Tom was being *groomed* for his role, by someone or something, just as Harry is.

I think Tom believes himself immune to Dementors since he discovered that Occlumency can keep them from jerking you around. And they appear to be following his orders.

I think he is probably wrong on both counts. And I wouldn't be that surprised if once he is mortal again, and appears to have lost the battle, they settled down and had him for lunch.

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[Swythyv]

I like "parasites" too. And I'm glad you're coming around to the Dementors having been invented by the MoM, and relatively recently, too. How many references have we had to Experimental Breeding, to clue us that this could happen? ;D



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I think it's telling that they are repeatedly referred to as "the guards of Azkaban" — as though that was their natural milieu, or something. And I think it was one of you who pointed out that we now have conflicting assertions on how to defend from them: Snape was not endorsing the use of the Patronus in his DADA class. In fact, I strongly suspect that defense against Dementors WAS NEVER, EVER TAUGHT before Snape took over that class. Think about it — they're the guards of Azkaban. Remember how Lupin came over all cagey when Harry asked him for a defense against Dementors in PoA?

I'm still holding out for invented as late as the 20th century, not long before Tom's birth, and that he was scarred by an attack when they escaped out of the basements into London. I completely agree that it's an excellent weasle-out of the Bad Seed problem, and I salute you both on the PoA/DHs echo of Remus-bitten-as-a-tad-how-sad motif. :D

I really don't think that they've been around even so long as since Seclusion. One tipoff that's occurred to me lately is that there does appear to be a genuine difference of opinion (Dumbledore vs. Wizengamot) about the Dementor's nature and whether they can be trusted. It seems to me that if creatures like Dementors had been around forever (like Giants, like Goblins) then their behavior should not be a matter of speculation: if they could rebel — as we have just been shown that they can and will — they would already be known to have done so in the past! Fudge is absolutely (and negatively) opinionated about trusting other species, so how on earth else (MoM's recent invention) could he be convinced that they were his to command?

Now it would indeed be the crowning irony that Tom will





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fall to the same gambit he played against the Ministry: having pulled the Dementor carpet out from under them, he will find himself rolled up in it at the end. I like that very much — and we can hope our heroes will send all the nasty things through the veil (or explode them in the Love Room), and see the wizarding world revert back to the good 'ol tradition of a Grand Sorcerer backed by his Sovereign. :D

-----  
[Professor\_Mum]

If you accept Dementors as a metaphor for parasites, they represent “something” eating away at you. Depression. Doubt. Defeat. No wonder Merope would have attracted them. Dementors are the opposite of Love... if you let a Dementor into your heart, nothing is possible. Is that the message Jo is trying to send? The damage done by losing faith in one's self?

Maybe Dumbledore is supposed to represent the Ethical Scientist who objects to combining a Leithfold with God-knows-what to create these guards. But he realizes that you can't succeed by having Dark watching Evil. He's like that guy in Jurassic Park who sees the obvious outcome: Nature will find a way...

I suspect the only way to destroy Voldemort also includes vanquishing the Dementor race (do they know this, hence the breeding efforts?). I also now suspect that Tom will tell Harry that he wasn't born bad, but once he was ordained “Lord of the Dementors,” he became enslaved by their aims. Dumbledore's willingness to admit, er, “problem kids” to his school was Tom's initial salvation and like Lupin he is capable of good. Oy... does she want us to love our villain?

Yep, forgot the point that the Dementors were blind — you

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are selected only based on your inner quality of depressing doubt, which can be sniffed out.

Yes, Snape's odd DADA lesson could indeed be important.

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[Swythyv]

I think you've cracked it:

*“Dementors are the opposite of Love... if you let a Dementor into your heart, nothing is possible. Is that the message Jo is trying to send? The damage done by losing faith in one's self?”*

Do you remember exactly what Lupin said, when he discovered that what came out of the Boggart's closet for Harry was a Dementor? Look:

*“Clearly, I was wrong,” said Lupin, still frowning at Harry. “But I didn't think it a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialize in the staff room. I imagined that people would panic.”*

*“I didn't think of Voldemort,” said Harry honestly. “I — I remembered those dementors.”*

*“I see,” said Lupin thoughtfully. “Well, well... I'm impressed.” He smiled slightly at the look of surprise on Harry's face. “That suggests that what you fear most of all is — fear. Very wise, Harry.”*

Dementors = Fear

Now round it out with the biblical passage:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

I have often heard spiritual observation that Fear casts out Love.

Joyce is right. There's a room full of Love in the basement of the mysteries, where they separated Fear from Love — and made Dementors. The @#\$ things escaped into London and



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nailed Tom before they were “gotten under control” and made Azkaban prison guards. They are NOT naturally occurring, and I’ve got three hairpins and an old button that say this WAS the reason Grampa Black got the muggle-protection OMFC for “services to the Ministry” as a young man (and likely Flamel associate). We’re meant to notice that a “services to” medal is \*code\* — in BOTH earlier instances — for “something nasty got out of the basement and we aren’t talking.”

Well done, all! :D

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[Professor\_Mum]

Holy crap... my elegant reply. Must ponder... did Frankenstein escape from the lab?

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[Me]

I wouldn’t think dementors were created as recently as the 20th century. But they may well be post-Seclusion. We did get those references to Tom being the most dangerous Dark wizard in a century. He may not be their first attempt at a coup.

Before Seclusion wizarding misbehavior was a matter for the regular criminal justice system. Maybe that’s one of the reasons the wizarding justice system is so screwed. They never realized that they were going to need one of their own after they set up seclusion, and what they’ve got now is band-aid solutions on top of older band-aid solutions until the joint will no longer flex.

And I think you are right about defense against Dementors never having been taught. They are “the guards of Azkaban.” They were developed with no other function. The citizenry is not supposed to be able to defend themselves against them. But it looks like their

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new monsters have developed ambitions of their own.

By the time Snape got that class the dementors had openly rebelled and left Azkaban and the need for defense was finally acknowledged. I suspect that the discovery that a Patronus — which is known to be effective against leitholds — was also useful against dementors was not widely advertised. It was possibly a Ministry secret. Remus was clued in — possibly years earlier — by Albus.

In fact, Albus may have been one of the ones to have figured it out. That could be another reason why he tied his messaging system to the skill. To ensure that all of his people would have additional motivation for learning how to cast one.

Yeah. Leithfold to suffocate, Boggart to dredge up and reflect fears, experimental breeding all right. Don’t know what else may be in there. Something vaguely humanoid in form at least. And I don’t know where the soul-eating comes from.

-----  
[Professor\_Mum]

“Vanquish” can refer to extinguishing a race... would opening that Love door up cause a swarm of loving Wrackspurts to escape the bldg. and vanquish the British Dementors?

“Unspeakables” — are they engaged in unspeakable (read: borderline immoral) activities, such as experimental guard breeding? Why not have regular wizards watching the prisoners? Are they afraid that magical humans could be imperiused through the bars by a dark wizard, hence they “create” a breed designed to diminish all whom they come into contact with?

Someone created a rather perverted penal system... who? Who has the key to the door? Oafish Hagrid?





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[Me]

Oh. Snap

Dementors were created before Albus Dumbledore was out of school. They were in place and established before he had any say in the matter.

I mean, we know that he impressed the hell out of Marchbanks by the time he was 18, and he was probably the most high-flying, shining star of his generation, even taken on by Flamel himself, probably before he was middle-aged. And we know what he thinks of the things.

The alternative is that they were created in reaction to the “dangerous Dark wizard” of 100 years ago. But Albus would have already been an influential character by then, and I just don’t see it happening. You cannot tell me that whatever fool created the things would have managed to carry it out on Albus’s watch. Whoever Flamel’s partner was before Albus either was asleep at the switch, or had gotten his priorities badly askew.

I suppose it is possible that the Dark wizard who had everyone’s knickers in a twist back then might have frightened everyone into being willing to accept such an extreme solution, and Albus was overborne, but I can’t see Flamel being overborne as well. Whoever authorized it must have convinced Flamel that it was an acceptable response to the problem. (May even have been the one to come up with the idea.)

Even though he seems to have kept an amazingly low profile, I’m with Swythv in suspecting that Flamel and his wife were a Very Big Noise in the wizarding world on any subject that they cared to give an opinion. And that Albus was certainly not his first “partner” and representative.



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[Professor\_Mum]

This must have been accomplished off Flamel’s radar, and Dumbledore’s first order of business as a Hogwarts grad was to bring it to Flamel’s attention. Alchemists are interested in purity, not monstrous deeds contra nature.

[Me]

I think the relevant factor in the creation of dementors was that they drain wizards of magic.

That they do it by pushing them into profound despair — to the point of ultimately invoking a failure of the will to live — was no doubt regarded as unfortunate but acceptable collateral damage.

But clearly what was wanted was something which would render the prisoners magically null, so they could be kept contained and under control. Even removing their wands would not have answered, since magic is conducted by wizards whether they are casting spells or not. And some level of wandless magic is always going to be a possibility. Particularly given that we have no certainty whether Apparation requires a wand or not. It doesn’t require an incantation.

Rendering the prisoners magically null is still likely to be required for any kind of wizarding penal system. But dementors are grossly in excess of the requirement. There has to be some better manner of producing the same result. Something in the food maybe?

[Professor\_Mum]

Maybe a better and more humane approach would have





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been a neutering one — turn them into squibs somehow.

Yes, drain wizards of magic. Agree. How this segued into soul sucking is beyond me... someone who admired the Horcrux approach, undoubtedly.

Now all of Harry's encounters with Albus make a little more contextual sense: His ability to love is what sets him apart from un-bonded Baby Tom. Harry wasn't Dementor fodder from the get-go.

Question: Why the HELL does Tom fear death?

[Me]

Well I did go into that. Unlike the orphanage personnel, Tom was able to see the dementor that was loitering about the nursery and frightening him out of his wits.

After he got a bit older and was growing up among Muggles, with only Muggle mythology and Muggle symbols to draw upon, what do you suppose he concluded that he had been seeing? What would a towering, faceless, hooded figure swathed in black with rotting skeletal hands read as to you?

[Professor\_Mum]

So Tom saw a corporal Boogiemán and since he was an unbonded baby, he was unable to generate a happy-joy-joy-love patronus. And since he is unable to generate them as an adult, he is unable to intercept Patronus messaging. So since he can't fight them, he decided to lead them.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mephistopheles>

Is Mrs. Cole a play-on-words for "Mephistopheles"? Coal/cole/black?

Others trace it to the Latin word 'mefitis' (also spelt 'mephitis',

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meaning pungent, sulfurous, stinking, and a noxious exhalation from the ground) Some trace it to the Hebrew word "Tophel" which means liar (Tueffel in German means devil, btw)

[Me]

For the record I think the progression goes: cole = kale = cabbage, or equivalent. But I could be wrong.

I think Tom saw a dementor, and later on, when he encountered representations of the Grim Reaper leapt to the conclusion that what he had seen was Death himself.

And, of course, since that was probably the most frightening thing he had ever encountered in his life, he decided that if he did nothing else, he was going to make himself forever safe from those things. Plus of course picking up the attitude that the way to master your fears is to be more scary than anything you've ever been afraid of. He's hardly the first to do that. (\*cough\* Snape \*cough\*)

So he deliberately set right out to be the meanest sonovabitch in the valley.

Seems to have succeeded, too.

Of course the dementors could still turn on him in a New York minute and he wouldn't have a hope of being able to save himself. And he doesn't realize that in the least. And they could have him for lunch and it wouldn't matter whether Harry ever found and destroyed the Horcruxes (or is one), since the Horcruxes themselves don't seem to have any conscious awareness or self-identity unless they have access to Tom's memories. His memories and his conscious "self" are all in the simulacrum, and that's the part the Dementors would devour. (Well at the time I wrote that they certainly didn't seem to have — and I still



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think the whole thing would read better if it had stayed that way. But then we'd have been stuck on the endless camping trip, dodging Snatchers without even a Pervading Atmosphere of Creeping Evil™ to enliven the "adventure.")

But as long as Tom's making things nice for them he's reasonably safe. After all, he hasn't tried to stop them from doing anything they want to do, yet.

We could quite reasonably see them turn on him at the 11th hour, and wipe out the whole lot of the DEs, Leader and all. And then leave everyone to have to deal with a cure that is worse than the disease. (Who does have that bloody key?)



## Regarding the Potterverse Part III

# Out on a Limb...

This set of essays spent a couple of years tucked into the collection of character studies. There was some justification, given that all three of them are heavily Snape-oriented.

But really, this is a demonstration of another method of developing theories. That isn't limited to any specific character.





## The View from the Martian Canals

This piece is a fairly detailed illustration of a technique which I refer to as “extreme theorizing.” As with “extreme sports” you tend to wipe out fairly spectacularly.

But then, you tend to expect to do that, eventually.

An “extreme” theory is not necessarily a wildly improbable one, or one which deploys vastly melodramatic solutions. Instead, to arrive at the theory, you approach the subject from the opposite direction than you would for a more conventional theory.

In conventional theorizing you consider what you know, and what that is likely to imply, and work from there. In extreme theorizing, you attempt to map the exact boundaries of what you do *not* know, and try to extrapolate what might most reasonably fit inside the gap.

In the first case, you look for supporting evidence. In the second, you look more for patterns.

The human mind is extraordinarily good at spotting patterns. However, it also has a tendency to try to force patterns into existence which aren’t actually there. I’ve rather often found myself to have been happily connecting the dots — which later turned out to be no more than spots before my eyes.

Such as, our present excursion to cruise the Martian Canals.



**T**his is probably the most \*extreme\* of the theories on the site. It’s been largely overturned by the revelations of DHs, but since I do not automatically believe or accept any of the revelations of DHs, I can’t see all that much reason to try to rework it to comply.

Besides, as it is it stands it serves as a good example of the

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kind of exploration that was still possible from the vantage point of the end of HBP. (And shame on Rowling for not only spitting in our soup, but for not even bothering to do a convincing job of it.)

Besides, any number of the relevant points — and there are some relevant points — still *remain* relevant.

By the end of HBP it had sunk in for some of us that we had two fairly obvious continuums running through this series, and they intersected. First, we had the “Dark Lord” continuum, which is squarely placed at the forefront of the story arc and consists of Tom->Severus->Harry.

It was obvious to every reader that we were *supposed* to be seeing parallels and drawing conclusions about the similarities and contrasts between these three characters. In fact, it seemed implied that we were supposed to be actively *looking* for such similarities and contrasts.

At the same time, there appeared to be a second continuum, which I will call the “Dumbledore’s Men” continuum, chugging along through the background which consisted of Hagrid->Snape->Potter and which was defined by an apparently personal alliance/relationship between each of these characters and Albus Dumbledore. And all three of these alliances/relationships were established when the junior partner was assumed to be very young.

And it seemed to me that if we were supposed to be looking for patterns and similarities between the characters of either continuum, let alone both of them, maybe we were supposed to be trying to fill in some blanks.

Because, even at the end of book 6 out of 7 we still had far



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too many blanks. And just about all of them stemmed from JKR's caginess about turning loose any solid information concerning the personal background of Severus Snape.

Perhaps Derrida was right, maybe a vast absence does connote a vast presence. And, maybe, just possibly, I thought we could construct a working hypothesis for Snape's background by drawing upon what we knew of the background of the other three characters who occupy the terminus points in these two progressions.

What we were looking for here was not specific facts, it was *patterns*.

And it did not escape me that of the four characters from those two intersecting continuums (Tom, Hagrid, Snape, and Harry) Snape, who occupies the pivotal position of both, is the only one of the four who had not (yet) been explicitly stated to have been at least effectively an orphan by the time he reached his teens. At the time I suspected that this, at least, might be a blank that Rowling intended to fill in at some point in Book 7. (Um. No. She did nothing of the sort. We have no idea of if or when Severus Snape lost his parents — or even whether he has merely misplaced them, and they are alive and simply living somewhere other than that house at Spinner's End.)

So shall we take a look at just what circumstances did appear at that time to occupy the other three terminus stations at the ends of these contrasting progressions.



Off on the periphery of the "Dumbledore's Men" pattern, but not by any means a part of it; Tom Riddle was effectively

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orphaned at birth and raised by well-intentioned but harassed strangers who never managed to love him. When the boy had reached the age of 11, Dumbledore took one look, took a strong aversion, and distanced himself. We don't know whether this made matters any worse. But it certainly didn't help. Tom lost his mother at birth, his father effectively even before that. He only literally lost his father at age 15. By his own hand.



Hagrid at the age of 3 was left with only his father, and at 12 with no (human) relatives to turn to at all.

Hagrid's father died when he was in his 2nd year at Hogwarts. From the internal time lines and information that was originally posted on Rowling's first official website, Hagrid was born Dec. 6, 1928. His 2nd year would have been the period between September, 1941 and July, 1942. In our world, this was well into WWII. It has always been assumed (although never established) that a Muggle war was raging in the Potterverse during the middle of the 20th century, even though we do not know its exact dates. We are told, early in GoF that Frank Bryce came home from a war with a stiff leg some time before the summer of 1942. We have no information as to whether that war ever touched Britain. The reputed wizarding war of the mid-20th century (Grindelwald's war) allegedly didn't.

This piece of backstory (the Riddle massacre) would have taken place during the summer between the newly orphaned Hagrid's 2nd and 3rd years. Riddle was in school, himself, in his 4th year, when Hagrid's father died, and could have had no input on that matter. However, there was enough allusion in



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this general set-up for the fandom originally to have speculated that Hagrid's father's death may have been related to the fact that there was a war in progress. When we were originally told of it, it seemed evident that England either was or had recently been at war.

In fact, this appears to be a misconception. Acto DHs Grindelwald never took his war to Britain, and we've no information confirming the existence of any Muggle war either. Our visit to Little Hangleton at the opening of GoF gives not even a hint that there was a war actually in progress at the time of the Riddle Massacre. Only that Frank Bryce had returned from one, some time earlier.

Riddle's remaining paternal family was murdered in the summer of 1942. A Muggle war had nothing to do with those deaths. A wizarding war even less so.

Acto Rowling a "global" wizarding war was, or had also recently been in progress, but in DHs it is stated directly that most British wizards had not taken a great deal of stock in the threat presented by Gellert Grindelwald, so whatever global wizarding war she is referring to, it does not appear to have been a factor in Britain (i.e., not as "global" as advertised, eh?). Instead, this would have been during the five year period that someone, probably the ICW was begging Albus Dumbledore to come and solve their Dark Lord problem.

Even now, we don't know for certain exactly what was going on with Grindelwald, and I still don't buy the usual Dark-Lord!Grindelwald theories out there. Rowling did not set that particular plot thread up in a manner wherein it makes any kind of plausible sense. But, given that we are directly told that

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it was Albus Dumbledore who eventually defeated Grindelwald, the chances are that whatever Grindelwald was up to, it may have still been in progress at the date that Hagrid lost his father. There was, however, no reason given, either then or later to suggest that Grindelwald directly had anything to do with the elder Hagrid's death. So we'll provisionally dismiss considerations of there being a war in progress or not as well.



It does appear to be fairly strongly suggested that Dumbledore stepped into the breach to take charge of the orphaned youngster, however. At least in an advisory capacity.

It is not established that Albus was Hagrid's Head of House. Indeed I am inclined to suspect that anyone who is so reluctant to take responsibility for the welfare of others as Albus Dumbledore, was never the Head of any House. But if "taking charge" can be defined as offering suggestions for what *other people* are supposed to do about an awkward situation and expecting them to be accepted, then one can certainly imagine Albus shoving his oar in. He may have "taken charge" of the boy in his authority as Deputy Headmaster, or even as a member of the Wizengamot.

But in any case, *somebody* certainly needed to. There are no wizarding orphanages, and the Ministry was hardly going to pack \*Hagrid\* whose Giant heritage was already obvious, off to a Muggle one. Some special arrangement seems to have been called for. Albus appears to be the person who stepped into the breach (Hagrid certainly seems to believe as much). But it could have actually been a decision made by Dippet, the Wiz-



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engamot, or the Board of Governors.

As to what these arrangements consisted of, we have no information. Presumably, some wizarding household, or establishment in a wizarding enclave took charge of Hagrid for the summer, and in September he returned to Hogwarts.

What seems most probable is that some arrangement was made for Hagrid to have spent the summer in Hogsmeade. Possibly doing odd jobs and being overseen by a family there. Or, not impossibly, under the eye of Aberforth Dumbledore, helping tend the goats.

The following year, when Hagrid was expelled, at the age of 14, Albus is widely understood to have been the one to have made arrangements for the boy's future, and to have eventually given him his mission. Hagrid has been doing odd-jobs (sometimes *very* odd jobs) for Albus and (probably) running messages between the Dumbledore brothers since either Aberforth took up his position at the Hog's Head, or Hagrid was old enough be allowed into the pub.

As a side note; it should be noted that children as young as 13 are allowed into the Three Broomsticks on Hogsmeade weekends.

(One belatedly has to raise the question of whether the rapid destruction of Hagrid's prospects within the wizarding world after Dumbledore took him under his wing — if it was Albus who did so — may have been at least partially motivated by jealousy on Riddle's part. One also suddenly has to question the sources by which Hagrid got that acromantula egg, and to wonder whether he got it in a similar manner in which he was much later given a dragon's egg. And whether the underlying source in both cases may have been the same.)

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Moving on: Harry was orphaned at the age of 15 months, by violence, which was directly connected to a wizarding war which was in progress. The conflict between Voldemort and the Ministry had escalated to the point that it was an openly acknowledged war something over 15 years earlier. Harry was turned over to the care of his only remaining (Muggle) relatives, who did not want him; were hostile towards him, and raised him grudgingly. At the age of 11, he comes face to face with Albus Dumbledore and by the end of the year has, according to Albus, won the old man's heart.

The summer Harry turns 16 Albus Dumbledore comes forward to remove him from his guardians' care and take charge of him. He makes at least some form of arrangements for the boy's future, even if it was only for the first month of the following summer. Over the course of the following year Albus gave him some briefing, and assigns him his mission.



If there is a genuine *pattern* within this continuum, then the possibility that Snape still had two living parents right up to the point he finished school really doesn't fit, does it? Or even *one* living parent. At least not one that was *accessible*..

In fact, the possibility that he still had living parents by the time he *started* Hogwarts doesn't particularly fit this emerging pattern, either — if there actually *is* a pattern and I'm not just off admiring the Martian canals. (ETA: we now know that Rowling did not follow Harry's pattern here and that Snape still



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had at least one living parent to see him off on the Hogwarts Express. But then, so did Hagrid.)

But, to set what were still at that time future revelations aside for the duration and to follow the process of stringing together an “extreme” theory; at the end of HBP, would it have made any difference to our established interpretations of Snape’s background if we postulated that Snape also became an orphan by the time he started Hogwarts?

I rather thought it might. Particularly if he lost his parents, or at least his mother, (i.e., his *wizarding* parent) by violence as a result of a war. Which had originally been a strong *appearance* of being an intrinsic part of the pattern for the Dumbledore’s Men continuum.

It is not a part of the pattern for the Dark Lord continuum, however. Tom murdered his father, yes. But he was not originally orphaned by violence. He was effectively an orphan from birth.

What might fit the pattern that seemed to be emerging over in the Dark Lord continuum, would be some incremental circumstances positioned between Riddle, whose mother died, whose father abandoned him, and was raised by well-meaning but harassed strangers; Muggles who grew to fear him, largely due to his own behavior, and Harry, who was raised first by loving family members and then abruptly handed over to hostile ones; Muggles who were not going to love him *regardless* of his behavior.

And, actual *parents* just do not seem to be an appropriate part of this pattern, do they? Although other relatives do. Until the release of HBP, JKR showed a distinct reluctance to depict parents who did not love their own children, however poorly

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they might do the job of raising them. And one of the strongest apparent similarities within the Dark Lord continuum seemed to be that all three of those characters appear to have spent a good deal of their youth as *unloved* children. With varying reactions to the experience.

In the context of the Dumbledore’s Men continuum, if this *was* a genuine continuum, then Snape’s experience should fall somewhere between, or be a combination of Hagrid’s, who was abandoned by his mother and raised by a loving father, and Harry’s who had two loving parents, and lost them very young.

At least to the degree of speculating that Snape may have also been orphaned, or effectively orphaned before reaching his teens, and that he had entered into some relationship with Dumbledore before reaching his majority.

And that a war may have had a relevant part in it.



At the opening of HBP Cornelius Fudge states that the Ministry had been trying to catch this “terrorist leader” for nearly 30 years. Inside the story, this statement was made early in July, 1996, according to the internal time line of the series. I do not think that Fudge is prone to the sort of hair-splitting accuracy which characterizes Minerva McGonagall. I also do not think that he was carefully subtracting the nearly 14 years that Voldemort was out of commission. “Nearly 30 years” ago, from the vantage point of the summer of ’96 would project the point at which the Ministry woke up and realized that Voldemort and his followers were a real problem as being around the middle or late 1960s. At that point, Severus Snape was still a child too



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young for Hogwarts.

Counting back from Albus Dumbledore's reference to the wizarding world having had little to celebrate for the past 11 years, in Book 1 chapter 1, the wizarding war was officially in progress, and Voldemort had already rendered himself unmentionable by the time Severus Snape and the Marauder cohort got their Hogwarts letters.

This would have been early enough for one of the younger of the original Death Eaters (which by this time probably included younger siblings of Riddle's own classmates, whose own time at Hogwarts did not overlap Riddle's) to remember reading a notice in the PROPHET announcing the marriage of a former Captain of the Hogwarts gobstones team and a Muggle. This would have been no later than 1959. We have no exact date for Riddle's return from his 10-year exile from Britain, but it would have been somewhere between 1957-'63. Whereupon he reconnected with some of his former associates from Hogwarts, and over the following few years gradually took complete control of them, ultimately ending in establishing himself as their Master.

That period was characterized by a number of unsolved incidents, disappearances, and other disturbing or violent events which were only later attributed to Riddle and his followers.

By this time, most people who stumble across this collection have probably picked up the message that by the end of HBP I was convinced that Snape was one of the White Hats.

I also was convinced that he had become a White Hat before the Trelawney Prophecy was made. A detailed analysis of the ramifications of what I believed had gone down the night of the Prophecy can be found in the essays entitled 'The Child Fore-

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told' and "'Loyaultie Me Lié."

I will have to concede that the revelations of DHs concerning the character and personality of Albus Dumbledore might make a reasonably convincing argument against it.

But then so many of the "revelations" of DHs are so totally unconvincing, not the least of these being the revelations of the chapter of 'The Prince's Tale,' that it is much easier than it ought to be to merely accept that Albus had managed to scam most of the wizarding world, and certainly the younger generations who had known him only as Headmaster (i.e., ones who never had to sit through a class with him, and listen to him contradict himself). Indeed, that most of them merely accepted him at face value on the strength of his reputation.

In any case, *this* exploration summarily dismisses DHs as any sort of a convincing reading of the likely direction for plot development from where we were standing at the end of HBP. I mean, really, from the place we were standing at the end of HBP, would *you* have expected Rowling to drag us off in the direction she decided to take the story in DHs?

Or, in other words, please continue to ignore the snake behind the curtain.



From every action that Voldemort had taken over the course of the series to the end of HBP it was clear that Snape did report *only* the first half of the Prophecy, and yet if things went down as Trelawney describes them — and unless they did there is no way that she *would* even be describing them — if Snape had time to hear only one half of the Prophecy, then it



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would more probably be the *2nd half*. You have to do all kinds of back-bends to try to resolve that, and it just isn't convincing, and it still points up the fact that Albus was *lying* when he told Harry that the eavesdropper was caught half-way through and ejected from the building before he could hear the rest. So, if Albus is caught dead-to-rights lying, I thought that there had to be a very good reason. (ETA: well, um, no, there isn't actually. He's just a liar.

Back then, I concluded that protecting one of his own agents would certainly be one such potential reason to lie about it.

For Snape to have reported *only* the 1st half of the Prophecy, which we had no solid evidence that he ever actually heard at all, served Dumbledore's end purpose, and resulted in Voldemort's first defeat. For that matter, it had created the conditions which we could all be confident would bring about his final defeat.

I did not think that this was done by accident. Albus deliberately set the whole thing in motion. It was on his watch, and by his say-so. If Severus heard the latter half of the Prophecy, or even the whole Prophecy, and reported only the first half of the prophecy, then he was serving Albus, not Riddle. And that report took place, at the very least, more than a year before the "official" version of a repentant DE turning his coat and going to work at the school, and may have taken place anything up to 2 years before Voldemort's first defeat.

And we hadn't a clue of what, or when, Snape's real turning point was.

Or at least not an overt *clue*. Just some interestingly-shaped gaps.

This is something that I was convinced we would be handed at some point in Book 7. There seemed to be no question

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that by the end of the final book we would know exactly why Dumbledore trusted Snape. (ETA: no such luck. Apparently Albus had merely *lied* about trusting Snape. Either that, or he trusted Snape to be so firmly under his own thumb that he would even allow himself to be dictated to by a portrait.)

This was probably something that we could not anticipate from any of the overt information available to us at that point. But from where we were standing *then*, the only time prior to the night of the Prophecy at which we \*know\* Severus and Albus had ever had a face-to-face discussion was in the aftermath of the werewolf caper.

So I extrapolated an "extreme" theory that the alliance between Snape and Dumbledore was first proposed at that time.

Once the possibility was examined, there seemed to be a lot to support it. I chose to adopt this interpretation and I gradually retooled most of my other assumptions to include the possibility that Severus had made a commitment to Albus before he was recruited into the DEs by Malfoy and before he even finished school.

I had, by that time, completely rejected the general fanon reading of Snape-loved-Lily.



In the absence of that one particular, pervasive fanon theory, the abiding mystery throughout the fandom was why Severus chose to ally himself with Albus at all. Somehow the fans seemed to find it difficult to accept that Severus may have done so merely due to a combination of his having been brought up with a functioning moral compass, and/or that he had eventu-



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ally come to a considered decision that it was the “right thing” to do. Boring, but hardly impossible.

For that matter, an even bigger, and still largely unexamined, mystery is why on earth the DEs, with their fairly well-known attitudes and the conviction of their own superiority, ever considered Snape worth recruiting in the first place.

Looked at rationally, Snape neither had nor was anything that *they* ever wanted. You would have expected them to simply bully him into obedience, and make himself useful, not to actually invite him into their own private club and teach him the secret handshake.

So just what shape of puzzle pieces might fit into *this* particular gap?

In the first place, at the time of the werewolf caper, Snape, like Sirius Black was no more than 16 years of age. Still a minor by wizarding terms. Most 16-year-olds would probably rather be heroes than lovers, so I was no longer holding out any expectation of his driving motive having been supplied by Lily Evans. I was also beginning to suspect that we were missing a critical piece of Snape’s earlier backstory which would fit both the Dark Lord continuum of Tom->Severus->Harry AND the Dumbledore’s Men continuum of Hagrid->Snape->Potter.

At about this point, a potential puzzle piece occurred to me which filled this blank space far better than any postulations depending on the essential irrelevance of teenaged romance.

This reading of what Snape’s underlying motivation to oppose Voldemort was, is that he had the *same* basic underlying motivation that Harry did.

Voldemort’s followers killed his mother.

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They may have killed his father as well, but at that point I really did suspect that Tobias Snape had walked out on Eileen under his own power after he discovered that she had deliberately concealed from him the fact that she was a witch, and that he was long gone by the time she died. This would also tie into the overall pattern of a Hagrid parallel — or even a Riddle parallel, scaled down slightly in that Severus would at least be able to *remember* his father. Or at least the final blowup between his parents — after which his father was simply gone.

I thought that we had probably all seen that blowup in that penultimate Occlumency lesson back in OotP.



At the other end of the equation, unengaged, harsh-tempered, disapproving grandparents would make a scaled-down, but close enough variant of the unwelcoming Dursleys to provide a Potter parallel. (Or for that matter, a Neville parallel.) With a potential reversal built-in, in that while most of the Dursley’s objection to Harry is that he is a wizard, the wizarding Princes would have objected to Severus for the sake of his Muggle father.

And, no, there was nothing in the books to directly confirm it. For about the Nth time; this particular piece is an exercise in extreme theories. There wasn’t one word in the books at that point to confirm Snape-Loved-Lily either, and a lot of people seemed to have no trouble accepting that.

I thought that if we were supposed to be noticing parallels and similarities between the trio of characters who all appear to have a faux-filial relationship to Albus Dumbledore, (Hagrid-



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>Snape->Harry) and were expected to try to fill in the blanks ourselves, this scenario would fit fairly comfortably into an apparent gap in the sequence.

(Tom,) Hagrid, and Harry are all orphans by the time they reach their teens. I was suggesting that Snape was as well. (Even in the wake of DHs we have no certainty that he was not.) Hagrid and Harry *appeared* to have both been orphaned either during, or directly as the result of a war. I suggested that, again, Snape was as well. And again, even in the wake of DHs we don't know that he wasn't.

Furthermore, both Hagrid and Harry had their futures personally disrupted and nearly destroyed as a result of Riddle's deliberate attentions. I thought Snape's experience might echo this, at least to the point of his suffering from the actions of Voldemort's followers. I postulated that all three of these boys were given a *personal* reason to oppose Riddle well before they came of age.

I suggested that Snape's father walked out when he was no more than 4 or 5, that he was orphaned at 8 or 9, and ended up with his Prince grandparents who had not approved of their daughter's marriage, and raised him out of "duty." Very cold, disapproving duty.

And, that, at some point before he came of age he encountered a crisis situation which ended in an interview with Albus Dumbledore wherein confidences were exchanged. As a result; he gave Albus his allegiance, and Dumbledore offered him his protection and support.

The werewolf caper still offered the best opportunity for that combination of elements. Ultimately Albus assigned him

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his mission — although that assignment may not have actually taken place until a year or three afterward.



Many fans (and for that matter, Rowling) haven't really given a lot of consideration to the fact that, thanks to Sirius Black, Albus was in a cleft stick in the aftermath of the werewolf caper. He had to get Snape's cooperation in hushing the matter up. And he had to offer the boy something of value in return. Something that the *boy* valued, and that he would keep secret. At that time (post-HBP), we may have twigged that our Albus wasn't as truthful as he liked to pretend, and we could see that he had made some major mistakes, but we did not believe that he was a bully. I did not assume that he would have simply forced compliance from a youngster who had a legitimate grievance. Nor, despite his cavalier relationship with the truth, did I think that Dumbledore was an outright cheat. I did not believe that he would attempt to "trick" Severus into complying.

But he had to get an agreement from him. Whatever he offered Severus, it had to be something real. And it had to be something the boy either wanted, or that he *needed*.

And, to be altogether accurate, I'd say that at that point there was no future mission involved.

What I thought he offered Severus was the possibility of an escape.

I did not think that Albus would have set up and encouraged an underaged Snape to deliberately infiltrate the DEs — who in Snape's own generation had never heard of Eileen Prince. It was their fathers who had killed her for marrying a Muggle, for-



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gotten her, probably didn't even remember her married name, and they certainly weren't boasting about it to their families. Severus had flown into Hogwarts under the DEs' radar. The only thing that the current batch of the DE junior League were aware of was that however clever the little mongrel might be, there are no Snapes listed in 'NATURE'S NOBILITY'.

What I believed Albus had assured Snape of was that if the DEs ever approached him, Albus would give him the option of hiding where they would never find him. Effectively, that Albus offered Severus the same deal we saw him offer Draco on top of the Astronomy Tower.

Instead, when the time came, Severus chose to stay in the game, and fight back, with Albus's support.



And no, once again, as of the end of HBP there was nothing actually stated in the books to support this conclusion either. Yet. But still it makes a better motivation than the love of Lily-bleeding-Evans. And, no, I don't think that Snape was precisely a "soldier for the Light" before he even came to Hogwarts.

At the point the agreement was made, neither of them, not Albus nor Severus ever expected that Severus would actually be offered a chance of *infiltrating* the DEs. They expected the DEs to show up and try to force him to obey them. They both knew that he did not fit their profile of a desirable recruit, with no influence to contribute to the cause. It's Albus who recruits followers from all backgrounds. Not Riddle.

For that matter, although in this scenario Snape had a more

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than worthy cause for a grudge against the DEs by the time he came to Hogwarts, at that age he didn't necessarily know what they called themselves and he certainly didn't know how to recognize them. (Who discusses that kind of thing with a 9-year-old?)

And the DEs do not, and have not ever had a unique message. Despite the fact that their aims are almost diametrically opposed, they had merely adopted the standard party line rhetoric of the pureblood isolationists virtually without modification. There is nothing in their quasi-public rhetoric to set them apart. That is how they have survived so long without broad detection. They are protected by the broad awareness that not all pureblood bigots are Death Eaters. Not even most of them are.

If the Princes shared the underlying assumption that purebloods are somehow inherently better than halfbloods or Muggle-borns — either from the standpoint of resentful halfbloods themselves, or as plebeian "nouveau" purebloods who had no other advantages by which to claim superiority, let alone from the standing of an old family which had fallen upon hard enough times for their daughter to have been thrown in the way of Tobias Snape — such distinctions would have been even further blurred for Severus.

And then, unlike Hagrid or Harry, he landed in what was shaping up to be the DEs traditional House, where we were handed a direct statement that a clique of high-status upper-classmen took him up, flattered him, picked his brains, and then — I suspect — summarily dropped him. And he resented it.

Boy, did he resent it! Our Sev is *good* at resenting things.

What is more, that bit of brief favoritism had also brought



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him to the attention and targeted him for endless persecution by another clot of kids in his own year (relatives of the same bunch of upperclassmen who had taken advantage of him — and a plague on *all* their houses!), and that lot weren't gone and out of his life by the end of his first year. (ETA: DHs also did him the favor of having him pointed out to Potter and his pals as a long-haired sissy whose best friend was a girl as early as their first trip on the Hogwarts Express, and who, moreover, let that girl boss him around. How could the Marauders have resisted an invitation like that?)

When he returned to Spinner's End at the end of his first year and asked his grandparents if they have ever heard of the Dark Lord, or the Death Eaters, he got far more information than he expected. It might not have been until this point that he finally learned what really happened to his mother. And why.

After the kind of dismissive treatment he may have gotten from Bellatrix, who we can be sure would have been openly going about pronouncing that the Dark Lord has the right ideas, Snape forms his own opinions about the kind of people who become Death Eaters, which he does not share with his housemates. (ETA: in DHs Rowling apparently has forgotten that she ever claimed that Snape was at school at the same time as Bellatrix, and never depicts it. For that matter, The dates she gives us for the Marauder cohort makes it completely impossible. Unless, of course, we dismiss the dates on the tapestry sketch. Or just refuse that entire line of reasoning by simply deciding that our informant, Sirius Back, is *also* a liar.)



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And over the following four years as he hears progressively more about the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters, and their activities, he also gradually comes to realize just how *badly* he had botched things for himself back when he was a naive First year and hadn't known any better. Those snotty upperclassmen who took advantage of him were almost certainly connected to the DEs who had killed his mother!

And he had made himself *useful* to them! And now they know he *can* be useful. And they are out there, waiting, and they know his *name*.

And even though Malfoy had taken him up afterwards, and was helpful to him, and didn't dismiss him the way Black and Lestrange and their lot did, and Snape is *obliged* to Malfoy, Malfoy is exactly the same kind of snooty pureblood snob that they were, underneath, and Severus can't altogether trust him not to believe that exactly the same things are his entitlement, too. And the same goes for Avery and "Mulciber" (who I still think was supposed to have been Evan Rosier, except that Rowling couldn't be arsed to check her own notes).

So of course Snape threw himself into DADA. And not just in order to learn how to create new hexes, either. He was on his own, a literal halfblood, a Slytherin, a potential target of *both* sides, and he was beginning to run scared. I really don't think that First-year Snape had resembled a "twitchy spider" when he had first come up to Hogwarts. And, as we can now see — if we can believe DHs — Lily was being *no help whatsoever*. She totally refused to admit any truth to the point that the Slytherin bullies who permitted Severus to tag along after them (and who at least could offer him some protection from



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Potter and his crowd by their mere presence — for while there may have been some exaggeration, I do not think Snape was lying when he claimed that James never set on him at less than 4 to 1 odds) were people who knew where he *slept*.

And then, at some point during 5th year, the continuing hostilities between him and those four Gryffindors (now seriously complicated — and escalated — by James's crush on Lily Evans) cumulated in the werewolf caper. And in the aftermath of that, when he is alone and face to face with Dumbledore, something is said that hits just the right nerve and it all comes tumbling out.

And Dumbledore offered him a choice.



As a grace note: In retrospect, many of Snape's problems seem to have stemmed from his having been Sorted into Slytherin.

I rather think that even if he knew nothing more than that it is supposedly the House which helps its members to get ahead in life, Severus would still probably have landed there. A child who determinedly irons out a regional working-class accent, painstakingly learns and adopts a kind of buttoned-up formality which will pass without comment alongside the manners of those of far higher social rank, is certainly not deficient in ambition.

But there is no question that he was certainly brave enough for Gryffindor. And more than clever enough for Ravenclaw. Indeed, that sitting room lined with books — most of which are described as "old" — in a house of the general socioeconomic level such as the house in Spinner's End is described, pretty strongly suggests a family that has traditionally Sorted into Ravenclaw, to me. And Young!Snape seemed to be sufficiently

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unclear on the concept regarding Slytherin's priorities to think that Muggle-born Lily Evans might land there with him.

However, Black, Lupin, Pettigrew, and Potter would have all been Sorted well before "Snape, Severus" was called. And if he had already locked horns with James, or fended off Black either on the train or in the boats, as we now know he did, it's likely he would have put the Hat on muttering: "Not Gryffindor, NOT Gryffindor..."



And finally, long after the Fair, it gradually dawned on me that I have been leaving out the real terminus point of both of these continuums.

Which is to say, Albus Dumbledore, himself.

Now, there is our real Man of Mystery. Just what did we know — actually know — about Albus Dumbledore by the time he died?

His full name was Albus Wulfric Percival Brian Dumbledore.

Or at least it was in OotP. Evidently neither Rowling nor her editors could be troubled to keep the middle name order consistent in DHs.

He enjoyed chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Acto Rowling, he had reached the age of about 150 by the time of his supposed death. This is pretty uncommon even for wizards. (ETA: and not, in fact, remotely the truth. From textual evidence as well as on the official site, by DHs Rowling had abruptly scaled his birth date back to 1881 from around 1840. Of course at the same time, she also was trying to claim that he died in '96, which would have been at the end of OotP, so



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whether or not we chose to believe it is up to us.)

He had a surviving brother named Aberforth, who has some unspecified but long-standing association with goats and no fondness for reading (and seems to have been employed since *at least* some time around 1960 as barman of the Hog's Head tavern in Hogsmeade).

He claimed to have a scar on his knee that formed a map of the London Underground. Allegedly. We only had his word for that. Since he also claimed to have once gotten a vomit-flavored Bertie Botts every-favored bean "in his youth," and Bertie Botts himself was only born in the 1930s, that is fairly safely categorized as a "likely story." The scar may be another one.

Well, okay, we could also conclude that he amused himself by telling "tall tales" to his unsuspecting listeners.

He was reportedly a man of high intelligence and a wizard of prodigious power, and it is faintly hinted that his powers developed precociously. He attended Hogwarts himself back in his day and impressed the hell out of Griselda Marchbanks when he performed his practicals for the NEWTs.

"They say" he was a Gryffindor. But we certainly have no certainty of that. The statement that we got also isn't anywhere up to our informant's usual standards.

He worked in partnership, or possibly by correspondence, with the noted alchemist Nicholas Flamel. With whom he had probably initiated a correspondence while he was still at school. At some point he discovered and published 12 uses for dragon's blood.

His public offices had been Chief Warlock of the Wizenmagot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederacy

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of Wizards, and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At the end of his life he held all three of these offices concurrently..

He was also remembered in connection with the defeat of what until DHs came out appeared to be one rather obscure Dark wizard back in the mid-1940s.

He was widely regarded as being brilliant, but a bit insane.

And his general politics virtually defined what is viewed as the Inclusionist agenda largely supported by the Ministry of Magic. We had no idea post-HBP whether he himself was a "blood-traitor," since we had no idea whether or not he was a pureblood. In fact it appears that he was more probably a technical half-blood, like Harry.



Not a lot of personal background in all that, is there.

In fact, it constitutes too large a gap to really be filled.

So, what else did we know? What had we observed?

(Apart from the fact that although he had allegedly been a Gryffindor, his methods, manner, and shortcomings were all purest Ravenclaw.)

He showed us every indication of having a long memory, and a very sound grasp on the kind of motivations which lead people to make mistakes.

He made a good appearance of being able to learn from mistakes. I am no longer altogether convinced by this act, but it was a fairly professional-grade performance.

He *allegedly* believed in second chances.

We heard him caution young Tom Riddle that he was not the



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first, nor would he be the last, young wizard to have allowed his magic to run away with him in a manner which is not tolerated in the wizarding world.

It only belatedly occurred to me that he may have been speaking from experience.

150 years (or even 115) is long enough to live down an awful lot of mistakes. Particularly mistakes made as a child young enough not to have known any better; mistakes that may have been made by “letting your magic run away with you” and doing things for no better reason than because you can.

We heard him tell Harry that human beings seem to have a knack for choosing exactly the things that are worst for them, too. That turns out to have had the ring of experience as well.

Quite unlike Riddle, however, Albus Dumbledore does not sneer at the power of human attachments (although he appears to be almost as wary as Riddle of forming any of his own). And we get no indication that Albus Dumbledore had ever viewed the world at large as his enemy.

I think in that regard the world was fortunate.



And there has to have been a reason that — before Riddle ever showed up to be Sorted — Dumbledore had learned enough about Horcruxes to make a fierce push to have the subject completely banned at the school. More than a dozen years before he had any opportunity of becoming Headmaster.

But it does finally occur to me that all three of the young wizards that Albus has either been *seen* to offer protection to, or is suspected of *possibly* having offered protection to (Severus

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Snape, Regulus Black, and Draco Malfoy) have without exception been young *Dark* wizards.

He knows that they — and, these days, Harry — are the ones most at risk.

The fact that he did not expel Sirius Black after the werewolf caper was a good deal less likely to have been in consideration of any ingrained favoritism towards Gryffindors, so much as in concern that his “cunning plan” to educate a juvenile victim of lycanthropy had nearly blown up in his face. We have heard of no subsequent attempts to accommodate juvenile victims of lycanthropy at Hogwarts since the Marauder’s day. And yet there must have been at least a few of them, given the stated philosophies of Fenrir Greyback — who was *not* in Azkaban and out of commission during the period that Tom was out of action. Chalk up another piece of long-reaching bad karma to Sirius Black’s account. After the werewolf caper I don’t think Albus was prepared to take that risk again.

I’ll have to admit that before DHs rendered all logic, common sense, and six books worth of observation into nonsense, I had no difficulty believing that even on a strictly personal level, Albus Dumbledore may have vastly preferred Severus Snape to Sirius Black. And maybe we need to keep in mind that James Potter (who we were repeatedly told abhorred the Dark Arts) wouldn’t accept Dumbledore’s offer to be his Secret Keeper — despite his renowned reputation or position as the Head of the Order.

And maybe we ought to remember that while Albus openly admitted at the end of OotP to having deliberately favored Gryffindor on *Harry’s* account ever since Harry got to the school, if we look past that admission, we can recall that it had



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been Slytherin which had held both the Quidditch Cup and the House Cup for a streak of several years standing prior to that.

Perhaps that was not entirely due to Snape cheating over House points.

In fact, it was beginning to look as though Albus Dumbledore may have had a soft spot for young Dark wizards.

All Dark wizards are not Death Eaters either, you know.

No more than are all Purebloods.

Or even all wizarding isolationists/supremacists.

In fact, given that it was now looking as though Riddle's human followers never numbered more than 5 or 6 dozen at the very height of his power and influence, I would say that comparatively few of them are.

And Albus Dumbledore may very well have qualified as one of the ones who wasn't. Possibly contributing to the reason of just why Tom Riddle remained so wary of him. Albus was a master of Tom's own favored branch of magic.

Albus certainly doesn't *encourage* the study of the Dark Arts. It's far too dangerous a study for anyone to be offering encouragement in it. But such an independent study seems to be both possible and traditional within Hogwarts. And I was prepared to think that Albus knew that there is a significant minority of youngsters who for any number of personal reasons, are going to gravitate toward such study anyway. And that these youngsters are not inherently evil, and should upon no account be led to conclude that they are.

And that they desperately need to be carefully guided and protected.

Altogether convincing? No, not altogether. The gap stub-

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bornly remains too large to be filled.

But if one asks whether this possibility falls within the parameters of what we did know at that point; i.e., the end of HBP, yes. It does. Quite comfortably, in fact.

Comfortably enough at least to raise the question of whether, when Dumbledore described the young Tom Riddle as having "traveled far and wide... sank so deeply into the Dark Arts, consorted with the very worst of our kind," he was really speaking of wizards *in general*.





## Attempting Necromancy

A couple of discarded theories were given a major shot in the arm by the events of 'HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE'. Or at any rate, theories which had been discarded by me.

If one can entertain the possibilities drafted out in my essay entitled; 'The View from the Martian Canals', then a lot of baggage which has been taken for granted since PoA is suddenly rendered superfluous. The whole theory of Snape-loved-Lily, in particular, was now completely in excess of the requirements of the projected story arc. Or at least as presented in the iteration of that theory which is usually favored in fanon.

Admittedly, by the time of the release of HBP I had relegated my "extreme" projection, explored in that essay to the "wishful thinking" bin. But it enjoyed a brief but triumphal return. I was very sorry to see it "canonically" hosed in DHs.

Although I suppose I really ought not to have been at all surprised. Rowling never let any of us forget for a moment that Snape was a thoroughly unattractive specimen, even in those flashes when he was "oddly impressive." Rowling seems to be every bit as fond of "pretty people" as Horace Slughorn.

Concurrently, you end up being forced to notice that while a few of the people on her casualty list were "beautiful martyrs", the ones who were still standing at the end, were typically people who were at least average to good-looking.

Or were essentially the comic relief, like Hagrid and Slughorn.

It's enough to make you wonder whether Tom's ultimate crime wasn't his determination to embark upon a program which was certain to spoil his beauty.



## Attempting Necromancy

At the end of HBP one of the most widespread revitalized theories across fandom was the old moldy chestnut that proposed that the real reason Severus Snape hated James Potter is because he had loved Lily Evans too.

By that time I really did suspect that we were all *supposed* to believe that Severus had loved Lily. But at that point I still also thought that while Lily was unquestionably central to Harry's story, she may well have been a redheaded herring to Snape's.

Although, not necessarily. There was room for a considerable variety of possibilities there.

At any rate, I strongly suspected that whatever significance she may have had to Snape's story, it was not what we'd been encouraged to *think* it was.

I was pretty sure that we'd all been had.

Deliberately, too. There was astonishingly little actual *support* for the regulation-issue Snape-Loved-Lily theory beloved of fanon anywhere in the books. And none at all for the conclusion that this was the reason Severus hated James. We'd already been given plenty of reason for Severus to have hated James.

Dumbledore also had already told us all the way back in PS/SS that James and Severus's immediate reactions to one another were on the same order as Draco and Harry's. And I really do think we can be reasonably confident that Draco and Harry's relationship had nothing whatsoever to do with rivalry over the affections of Pansy Parkinson.

Or Ginny Weasley, either.





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And, for the first book or two, we didn't think so either. The whole Snape-loved-Lily theory appears to have been a by-product of PoA.

Well, to be altogether fair, the whole phenomenon of Snape *fandom* was to a large extent a by-product of PoA. Prior to that point in the series, the majority of the readers were perfectly content to see Snape as merely "that nasty teacher who hates Harry."

Plus, of course, incidentally, he was also the only really interesting *adult* character in the series. Mainly because by the end of the first book he had refused to fit into a simple pigeonhole and permit himself to be categorized and dismissed. Regardless of however much fans may have tried to shove him into that pigeonhole.

But after the showdown in the Shrieking Shack there was no looking back. The theory of Snape-loved-Lily [S->L] leapt out of the margins of PoA (not, it should be noted, the actual *text*), grabbed us all by the throat, and hung on like static cling.



And Snape-loved-Lily looked pretty good, circa PoA, when we really did feel a need for some additional context to the "hereditary enemy" backstory for Severus Snape and James Potter that we had been handed by Quirrell, and which had been confirmed by Albus Dumbledore all the way back in PS/SS. That Albus had already begun harping on his theme of "so great a Love™" in Book 1 only pushed fanon's expectations further in that direction.

By OotP I had finally managed to peel it off and relegate it to the waste bin, and frankly, that came as a relief. But then I

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had to reconsider the idea all over again after Slughorn spent a whole book trying to throw the pair of them into proximity.

And I still could not buy it. I thought there may have been a brief interaction between them in 6th year (since at that point we hadn't yet been told about Lily kicking him to the curb when he tried to apologize) but even if there was I didn't think it was going to amount to what the fans wanted it to amount to. As I have already pointed out in the essay on the Martian Canals, I thought that Snape already had ample motivation to do his part in bringing down the Dark Lord without adding the dubious motivation of the "love for a good woman."

And when examined; S->L didn't even fit Rowling's basic message.

Or not the one she admitted to.



The saving grace of the Potterverse may very well be Love, but it was emphatically not *romantic* love. In fact, HBP could readily serve as a crash course for an introduction to Rowling's apparent opinion of the relevance of romantic love to anything of substance. Only Bill and Fleur seem to have got it right. The ballots were still out on Remus/Tonks. And none of the kids came within hailing distance of even being able to scrape a "pass."

Think about it. The only form of Love that had actually done anything in the whole series so far had been a mother's sacrifice for her child. A love so "fundamental" as to be often confused with a biological imperative. This may be regarded as overwhelmingly sentimental, but it sure ain't romantic.

Sentiment is not romance. And there are far too many fans



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who do not make that distinction. I suspected that they may be disappointed at the end of the day. If Harry Potter brings Voldemort down by the Power of Love™ it will not be by the power of Harry's love for Ginny Weasley. And whatever Severus Snape is motivated by, I seriously doubted that it had all that much to do with Lily Evans. Indeed, the **ONLY** character we had met by that point in the whole series whose actions were unequivocally motivated by romantic love was Merope Gaunt, and we all know how well *that* worked out. (ETA: and in DHs Rowling went and gave Snape a badly-fitting personality transplant and rendered him down into nothing more than Merope Gaunt "lite." \*sigh\*)

Upon the whole, I get the feeling that, in the Potterverse, to permit oneself to be spurred into action upon the consideration of romantic love is likely to be as disastrous as to permit oneself to be goaded into action in response to a Prophecy. It is apt to be just as deceptive and/or illusionary. And it certainly doesn't win you any respect from your author.

And, in the end, even I have to agree that, in my opinion, a desperate attempt to save the life of the only friend you ever had in an emotionally-starved childhood — even when the shallow little user eventually hung you out to dry and wouldn't give you the time of day — vastly trumps any kind of "romance," even if it sure doesn't seem to serve you any better in that quarter.



And around that time I thought I might have finally decoded the "significance" of Harry's having Lily's green eyes, too.

And I decided that it *wasn't* significant. I expected it to have

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no functional interaction with the storyline. It wouldn't enter into the solution of the problem with the Dark Lord, it didn't relate to Harry's relationship with Snape in any significant manner, and it would have no effect upon the action.

I had finally decided that it is there strictly for symmetry. A detail intended to flag and to maintain the parallels and contrasts to the other key characters in the Dark Lord continuum. In this case, specifically to enhance Harry's parallel to Tom Riddle.

It blew right past us in HBP that Tom — like Harry — is the image of his father.

With one striking feature that he owes to his mother. In Tom's case it was the ability to speak and understand Parseltongue (as well as the fact he is a wizard at all). In Harry's, it is Lily's green eyes (and possibly the fact that he also seemed to have inherited more of her character than that of James).

And when you stop and remember, Hagrid, who clearly takes after *his* mother has his father's beetle black eyes.

And I really did think that was all there was to it. It was set-dressing. It didn't "mean" anything.

Or maybe not. I wasn't able to completely dismiss the possibility that it *might* have a point.

Harry's physical resemblance to James had served an actual plot function in PoA. I supposed that if the Book 7 = Book 3 interpretation panned out, Harry having Lily's green eyes *might* yet turn out to matter in DHs. For something.

As if.



After our trip into the Pensieve it was clear to anyone who



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cared to look that an unrequited crush on Lily Evans was no longer required in order for someone as jealous of his dignity as Severus Snape to hate James Potter, *forever*.

Even leaving aside the fact that most men will tend to connect favorably with the child of a woman he ever really *loved*, even when the kid isn't his.

And from that point, I could no longer entertain the idea of the standard issue Snape-loved-Lily seriously.



And just what *did* Albus actually have to say about the matter back in PS/SS? What does Dumbledore's version of the feud amount to? James and Severus "took an instant dislike to one another." (So?) Their relationship "resembled that between Draco and Harry."

So what? What did *that* amount to? Some name calling; a rather nasty little attempt to get Harry in trouble that cost him a lot of House points. So? You carry a feud over to the second generation for *that*?

Fish fuzz. Even if you are as petty as Severus Snape you need more reason to carry the hate over to the guy's kid than that.

As of OotP Rowling finally gave us one.



However, after the release of HBP we were forced to have to reconsider the possibility of *some* form of Snape-loved-Lily being in the equation, because with the entry of Horace Slughorn and his reminisces of students past into the story arc he seemed to at least insist on putting Lily and Severus into *proximity*.

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It is hard to believe that either of those two would have failed to sign up for NEWT-level Potions. So they at least were sitting in the same classroom for their final 2 years at Hogwarts.

Of course, *act*o Rowling, by then Lily wouldn't have given Severus the time of day. So perhaps Slughorn's failure to make any further comment regarding a discernible friendship between them is hardly surprising.

Mind you, I always admitted that Severus may easily have *fancied* Lily. A great many young wizards did. She was a very good-looking young witch, highly popular, and any of the reigning Quidditch star Potter's signs of crushing on her would have even further brought her into general attention. And you have to admit that James Potter wasn't what you could call subtle in his attempts to draw her attention, either. It's no stretch to propose that Snape had taken notice and agreed that she was fanciable.

And I rather thought that he might have been annoyed at himself over that, too. Because she was everything he was being prompted by his so-called peers in Slytherin House to despise. And, just to put the icing on the cake, *Slughorn* kept going on about her as well.



Well, okay. Theories are fun. And I'm a theorist. You want a Snape/Lily theory? Here's one made to order. It's totally hosed, but I'd had it posted in the collection for a couple of years at least by the time DHs was released and I never saw this particular one anywhere else, although I may just have missed it. And back in the wake of HBP it was looking at least marginally possible. I don't know whether anyone else would find it more



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satisfying than Rowling's. But I'll have to admit that Rowling's version didn't satisfy me at all.

This possibility got kicked off when I received an e-mail from someone who had been following the site. My correspondent tried to float the theory that Snape and Lily had at some point sworn an "Unforgivable Vow" (yes, that's exactly what she said) which had led to every bit as bad an end as one might have anticipated.

Well, leaving aside the fact that by that time, the Unbreakable Vow was striking me as every bit as tacky a plot device as a Prophecy — and ghod knows there were already too many of those running about, and I strongly suspected we'd get another one in Book 7 — the whole thing just didn't wash from where I was standing.

However; it did jog something else, and I suddenly thought I might have another extreme theory on my hands.

Preliminary question; aren't we perhaps taking something for granted that we ought not to be when we just assume that of course the Gryffs and the Slyths shared Potions classes through the lower grades in the Marauders' years, merely because they do so in Harry's?

I think we could be.

Maybe the components of the combined classes rotate.

For that matter, maybe the class sizes were large enough 20 years earlier that mandatory classes like Potions at OWL-level weren't combined at all. If some classes are only shared when a given year's enrollment is smaller than average, as might well be the case with Harry and Ginny's years; their birth years being during the very worst part of VoldWar I when anyone but unin-

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formed Muggles, over-confident DEs, and the Weasleys might have been hesitant about starting or increasing their families. Back in the '70s, the two Houses may not have shared any core classes at all. The Marauder cohort's birth year(s) was some years before the DMLE even realized that there was a terrorist group targeting segments of the population.



So, come 6th year we have Snape and Lily in NEWT-Level Potions together. Regardless of whether the Gryffs and Slyths had been paired at OWL level or not. For the purposes of this theory, we will assume not.

At the same time, I could not really imagine any compelling reason for any of the Marauders to have also done so. Lupin admits he isn't good enough at Potions to have qualified, Peter is too lazy to volunteer for extra class work (although he appears to be reasonably competent at Potions), and James and Sirius were Transfiguration and Charms whizzes, but, despite a large percentage of the fandom which is determined to try to claim they wanted to be Aurors, they more probably were not bucking to get into any professional field that required a Potions NEWT, and had no reason to. They probably didn't much admire Slughorn, either. Most of Sluggy's pets were exactly the people that Sirius most despised, and James would have stuck with Sirius in a show of solidarity, even if it did mean he had one less opportunity to try to impress Lily.

And on Slughorn's end of the equation, we never once heard him even mention James Potter's name. It certainly doesn't sound like he knew him well. Or considered him at all memora-



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ble. Regardless of his family connections.

Consequently, if any sort of interaction between Snape and Lily took place, it would have been off the Marauder's radar in NEWT-Level Potions class.

Which, before DHs was released, was a perfectly viable speculation. We didn't know about them having been childhood friends, then. (In retrospect, that appears to be the *only* piece of new canon that was introduced in DHs that no one appears to have had any difficulty accepting. Poorly handled as it ultimately was.)



And I don't know about you, but I certainly didn't get a lot of feeling of past patronage and obligation in the vibes between Slughorn and Snape. I caught the echoes of a very tepid degree of mutual respect at best. Snape and Evans shared a classroom, but I am still not fully convinced that they shared the Slug Club.

Although they may have. I will admit that much. Snape does seem to have been invited to Slughorn's Christmas party, which was for Sluggy's favorites, past and present. And Slughorn certainly appeared to display no surprise that Snape showed up. Snape could have been a former Club member. Even if not a particularly prominent one. Or, perhaps, Sluggy just extended the invitation to the rest of the staff.

As a consequence, I wondered whether Snape may have initially resented Lily like mad.

Or, I conceded, he may have been just as bowled over by her potions brilliance (once he saw it for himself) as Slughorn was. But going by the information at our disposal at the time, by the

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end of his 5th year I doubted that he ever had any authentic interest in her as a *person*.

Rowling did a very good job of isolating Lily from the whole storyline and rendering her pseudo-irrelevant. She was reduced to a symbol. A Thing. I even suspected that the "filthy mudblood" crack may not even have been the first, or a one-off. Although her shocked reaction suggested this certainly wasn't typical conduct from Snape, and it certainly wasn't something she acted like she was used to having thrown in her face, either.



For my own part; after my experiments at the "extreme sports" end of the activity of theorizing I was no longer even slightly inclined to support the still widely held Snape-loved-Lily theory. I couldn't see the Snape-loved-Lily — in its typical iteration — as a viable factor in Snape's backstory at all.

Over on the Martian Canals, I proposed that he had much better motivation to do his part in bringing down the Dark Lord on his *own* account than any soppy (and wholly implausible) nostalgia over a stint of unrequited teen lurve. Even Rowling hasn't been tacky enough to expect us to swallow *that*.

And I thought — or *wanted* to think — that Lily herself *mattered* more to the story arc, and for far stronger reason than just that a lot of different teenage boys had once happened to fancy her.

From where I was standing, S->L — as it was typically reduced to its common denominator by the fandom — was a theory which seemed to have become about as necessary to the overriding plot as the — by then completely exploded — theory



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of MemoryCharmed!Neville.

I was quite prepared to accept that there may indeed have been something between the two of them. We seemed to be getting a build-up to *some* kind of reveal on that front. But I suspected that it wasn't anything as obvious as just some stupid teen crush.



Well, skipping off into the land of theories past; prior to DHs when we knew nothing of any prior associations between Snape and Lily, and could still make a viable effort to think well of all these people, I thought that the disgraceful performance by the lake may have been the point at which a certain Severus Snape had suddenly shown up above Lily's horizon and had become a real person.

Who didn't like her.

And if she was anything like as promising a youngster as we had been led to suppose (which it turns out she totally *wasn't*, she was a self-worshiping and self-righteous little user, and shallow with it besides), she would have been honest enough to admit that she had given him some reason not to like her; bouncing in and making the whole incident all about *her*, instead of fetching a teacher. And she (again, unlike Hermione) wasn't *used* to being disliked.



At the end of HBP we still hadn't really anything to draw an informed conclusion from. But Lily had been set up as being a young woman with a streak of decency to her (another promise

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that Rowling welshed on). And just because she had red hair, there was little reason to assume that she was necessarily as vulgar and self-righteous as a Weasley. What if, once her temper cooled off, she came to the conclusion that her *own* behavior in that exhibition was simply not justified, and she offered *Snape* an apology?

How often has Snape ever been given one of those?

He'd been hanging around with Blacks and Malfoys, remember?

That alone might have blown him away. Particularly since he can hardly be unaware that her calling him Snivellus isn't nearly as inexcusable as his calling her mudblood. And the very fact of his whole "total makeover" seems to suggest that he really *can* learn from example.



And the more I try to wrap my head around it, the less certain it seems to me that Snape was in the Slug Club at all. He certainly *should* have qualified on the grounds of intelligence, skill and ambition, but there is an additional qualification in which Snape is notably lacking, and that is the one which probably counts above all others. That qualification is a capacity for personal gratitude to Horace Slughorn.

Rank ingratitude is certainly not one of Snape's shortcomings. If anything, he is far too willing to submit to abuse from those he trusts, without more than token protest. But he is not indiscriminate in his acceptance of favors, and he has learned (probably the hard way) to be selective about who he permits to patronize him. I also rather suspect that he was every bit as put off by Slughorn's obvious vanity and name-dropping as Harry was.



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And there almost appears to be another unstated qualification for the Slug Club as well. All of the complete outsiders that Horace has been known to have taken up were bright, magically gifted, and ambitious. Some of them were socially adept as well. But the ones we have actually *seen* him take under his wing also seem to have had something else in common, too. For that matter, rather a lot of the kids that Slughorn took up on the strength of their “connections” appear to have had this quality in common also.

They were just about all of them very good-looking.

I get quite offended when some fans try to paint Slughorn as a slimy old pedophile, which he absolutely is not, but there is no denying that he does love to surround himself with beautiful things. And beautiful children, too.

So where does that leave geeky, gawky, homely young Severus Snape?

The kids who rate the Slug Club are also the ones who Sluggo believes will reciprocate by not forgetting him when they have left Hogwarts and embarked on their careers. And these usually are also kids that he can honestly tell himself will have a *reason* to be grateful to him, because he really *does* perform a valuable service to them by singling them out and promoting their advancement.

We’ve been given no reason to believe that he ever performed any such services for Severus Snape. His input certainly had no affect upon Severus’s position *now*. He certainly does not make any such claims, either. And if he had one would have expected him to. The the most we ever herd him claim in Snape’s case is that he “taught” him.



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Striking poses of intellectual superiority is not a part of Snape’s “self-made gentry” performance. That annoying habit came with the territory when he was still just a grubby, pushy little commoner with a northern accent. And from the degree of annotation that was added to Slughorn’s preferred text, it is possible that Snape considered himself well above Slughorn in Potions-brewing and, being Snape, he would have made sure that Slughorn was aware of it. In short, that in his opinion there was nothing that Slughorn could teach *him*. (I do not think that Snape was a particularly likable student for a teacher to have in their class. Especially not if he was *good* at the subject.)

That alone would have permanently disallowed him from being invited into the Slug Club. Also, Bellatrix was known to have been a member, back in the day, which might have further put Snape off of it. An attitude which he — most ironically — shared with Bella’s cousin, Sirius Black.



For his part, Sirius Black would have certainly recieved an invitation to the club on the strength of his family connections. And he would have spurned it — on the strength of his family connections. Anything that cousin Bella had ever been associated with was nothing that he wanted any part of.

With James, we can be less certain. James was pureblooded, affluent, clever, good-looking, and obviously talented. You would expect him to have been a natural choice for one of Sluggo’s handpicked little stars. But if James had ever set foot in his Club, Slughorn would have made a big deal of it as an inducement to Harry, and James’s name is never heard to pass Slughorn’s





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lips. If James was extended an invitation, it would appear that he must have refused it in a show of solidarity with Sirius.

Besides, from everything I've managed to figure out, James Potter had next to no ambition. He just wanted to have *fun*.

All of which boils down to the possibility that IF Lily's first exposure to Snape, in his element, had been in a NEWT-level Potions class, *after* the embarrassing incident in which he first showed up on her radar, she might very well have discovered something to draw her interest away from James Potter (to whom she was "not speaking") at least temporarily. Lily was unquestionably a member of the Slug Club, and she might have been astounded that someone who was so *obviously* qualified, and was in Slughorn's own House, *wasn't*. And after 5 years of basking in Slughorn's regard she would have learned to recognize excellence in the subject when she saw it, and to accord it the respect it merits.

For that matter Snape may have been gobsmacked to discover that that damn mudblood that Sluggy was forever raving about really was every bit as good as he said! And more. I did think that there is a *scant* possibility that Lily might really have been even better at Potions than he was. I did think that he was impressed — and that's *not* easy. Whether that translated into resentment, or admiration, or competitiveness I would hesitate to guess. I rather thought that the direction whatever the interaction took would have been determined by Lily.

And Slughorn, of course. He encourages competition in his classes. But he doesn't despise cooperation. I think he may have deliberately thrown his two best students together to see what they produced. Even if they did start the year being distinctly

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uncomfortable and "stand-offish" with one another; both of them still smarting from the ugly incident at the end of the previous year.



But, my primary reason for suddenly feeling a need to back-pedal my earlier pooh-poohing of the whole rather mawkish concept of Snape-Loved-Lily was because I suddenly realized I was overlooking another parallel of the sort that keeps cropping up in the aforementioned Dumbledore's Men continuum.

I suddenly thought we may be getting another inter-generational echo here.



I still didn't think that they were "spooky" on each other. But they may have each regarded the other as the only potential equal in the class on offer. And Sluggy, like I say, is just as capable of encouraging cooperation, as much if not more than competition, even if the two had started the class being a bit "standoffish" with each other.

Thanks to Slughorn, it was glaringly obvious by the end of HBP that we were all supposed to think that there had been *some* kind of relationship. And from the information we had at that point, to me it seemed most likely to have developed over the course of Year 6. I also suspected that we were being led to misread the context of whatever that relationship was.

In this, at least, I turn out to have been on the right track. But I will go on record and state that I think this particular segment of the story arc would have been better served by Rowling



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by dropping at least a hint or two more than she did of there being an early association, (probably via Petunia, a couple of books earlier, which is the source of the only hint that we ever actually *got*) than to artificially maintain the complete absence of information she chose to give us. Because, in retrospect, it *does* come across as artificial.

Of course since Rowling has been determined in all her post-release interviews to cheapen the whole relationship by insisting that it was romantic (which it absolutely was *not*, and neither did she depict it as such) she has ended up failing to altogether convince me that even an authentic *friendship* ever truly existed, and that Snape had not merely encountered the first in the series of his sad little life's "users."



Over the course of HBP, we'd also had rather a lot of parallels drawn between Lily and the "new" Ginny. Many of them given to us directly by Rowling herself. That much was absolutely deliberate. Lily is clearly supposed to have been more in "New Ginny's" style than the sort of bloodless madonna figure that much of fandom had envisioned prior to OotP. I'll admit that I'd like to have *hoped* this was misdirection. It was certainly a miscalculation. Most of the fans that I've encountered *\*despised\** "New" Ginny. What is more, over the course of HBP "New" Ginny ended up coming across more like a "New" Bellatrix in every chapter we met her. And we hardly needed two of *those*.

But given that in DHs Lily comes across as a shallow little user who turned out to be utterly useless in a crisis, refused to take the least bit of responsibility for her own actions (yup,

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Harry's definitely her kid all right), and was willing to throw anyone but Harry to the wolves rather than come across as looking bad herself, I would certainly not count on it.

But for all that there are multiple similarities, Snape just does not serve as any kind of a stand-in for Harry. Harry/Ginny just doesn't feel like the right pattern to look for when we try to sort out the probabilities of any relationship between Lily and Snape.



Or is it?

Let's take a closer look at the situation between Harry and Ginny, shall we?

By the end of Book 6, Harry has accepted his mission and has set Ginny aside for her own protection. Which even the shallowest reader can see would ultimately be no real protection. The whole school already knows of their association. "Everybody" has presumably been talking about it for months.

It is hardly breaking news that Post-HBP I was giving a great deal of public reconsideration to the old Snape apologist theory that Severus Snape signed on with Dumbledore even before the end of his Hogwarts days. That an offer of protection — if the DEs ever approached him and tried to force him to cooperate with them, was made to him in the aftermath of the werewolf caper. And that when Malfoy *did* approach him, Snape chose to fight from inside, rather than to go into hiding. It is gone into in some detail in the 'View from the Martian Canals' essay, too.

(I still think this would have made for a highly satisfying "reveal" in DHs.)



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So, just what was Ginny to Harry in Year 6? She was “officially” his girlfriend for part of it, yes, but their actual relationship hardly sounds particularly romantic. And she was effectively a new discovery. She became his greatest source of *comfort*, not excitement. They were friends. It was the kind of friendship that might readily deepen into something far more extensive given time and encouragement, but at that moment they were still mostly friends.

At the end of Year 6 Harry has known about the Prophecy and his place in it for the past year. Circumstances have raised their ugly heads with a call to arms and he has finally accepted his role, and is setting his life in order, so he can concentrate on his duty. How might this parallel to Snape?



At the end of his Year 6 I believed Snape had known for the past year that Dumbledore will hide him if the Death Eaters should approach him with coercion in mind. He had already realized that he himself is and has nothing that the DEs really want, apart from cooperation, but that if they decide that he ought to make himself useful to them, he will not be given the option of refusing. Dumbledore has offered him a chance of escape.

And now, at the end of Year 6 I thought that perhaps he had been approached by Malfoy regarding his future plans.

He would already be of age by that time. His birthday is in January. He has his Apparation license. Voldemort may or may not induct boys who are still at school into his ranks, but Malfoy is putting in an early bid, on the grounds of previous associa-

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tion, in order to enlist Snape’s support even before he is out of Hogwarts, intending to introduce him to his Leader under his own patronage. In short, Malfoy isn’t merely threatening to force Snape’s cooperation, he is offering Snape the opportunity to actually join up, under his sponsorship, and *infiltrate* the organization,. All Snape has to do in return is to make Malfoy look good to their Leader.

Snape has reported this to Dumbledore. He has declined the offer of being hidden, (which to be fair, would also mean missing out on his NEWTs) and made his own counter-offer to serve Dumbledore as his agent. Neither Snape nor Albus had ever anticipated that an opportunity of *that* nature would be on offer. Snape just plain doesn’t *fit* the typical demographic for recruitment. And Albus didn’t already *have* anyone inside that organization.

It was just too tempting to let pass.

I speculated that after assuring himself of Snape’s sincerity (and no doubt trying very hard to dissuade him), Dumbledore (well, Dumbledore as we *thought* we knew him before DHs) had accepted the offer and pledged his support. Snape had accepted his role, and in the summer before Year 7 he was setting his life in order, so he can concentrate on his duty.



What, I wondered, was whether Snape and Lily had become friends — not so much as Harry and Ginny are friends — and confidently expected to become more than friends, but more as Harry and *Hermione* are friends (or possibly to be even more accurate, as *Ginny* and Hermione are friends), and that Snape



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may have confided his mission to her? At least to the degree of explaining why their friendship had to remain secret, kept in the background, and why he could no longer risk an open association with a Muggle-born witch.

As well as the corollary that for her to be associated with him was not safe for her, either, and something of why.

Snape may have been rather more forthcoming with Lily than Harry was with Ginny. I think Severus may have trusted Lily more than Harry trusts Ginny. Harry after all, has other, closer confidants. Snape did not.

I think he explained what he was risking, and what could go wrong, and why Lily should distance herself from him, for her own safety.

I think he did promise to try to keep the Death Eaters away from her.

A promise that he unknowingly broke when he reported the partial Prophecy to Voldemort. The fans were right about that much. Once he discovered the results of that action his remorse was both profound and utterly sincere.

But, regardless, nothing connected to the public, overriding issue of VoldWar I or II actually came of Snape/Lily. That is not the reason Snape turned to Dumbledore, and Snape's remorse at having endangered Lily by reporting the partial Prophecy on Dumbledore's orders is not the reason that Dumbledore trusted him. If an association between them existed at all it dates from that brief interlude during 6th year.

Since at that point in time we were all still inclined to read Lily as an essentially decent person, rather than a shameless little user, I was beginning to think that they may have struck

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an agreement. He promised her that he would try his best to keep the DEs away from her, and that if something went horribly wrong; something happened to Dumbledore, and Snape was arrested and threatened with the Dementors, she would try to speak in his favor. That might have been the conversation (with "that awful boy") that Petunia overheard.

In this alternate universe, they may have continued to be friends for as long as Lily lived, although I suspected that unless they were co-workers, they may not ever have met face-to-face after they finished school.



But they may have corresponded. We have been given a fairly strong hint that the tiny, crabbed "hand" of Snape's school days, which is scribbled all over the ADVANCED POTIONS-MAKING textbook is not the same script as the one that has been showing up on the chalkboard in his classroom for the last 15 years. Nor does it sound much like the large spiky 'Ds' that showed up on Harry's essays. It is easy to postulate how Snape might have been prompted to iron out a regional working-class accent, or adopt his formal, buttoned-up manner in the interests of his own advancement, in order to make himself "presentable" when moving among his higher-status housemates, but why would he choose to reinvent his handwriting as well, unless he had some reason to want to correspond with someone in a script that no one would recognize and identify should a letter fall into the wrong hands? Such an aim would not have been necessary for correspondence with the Death Eaters. Nor for corresponding with Albus, either. So who then? Tom Riddle isn't the only



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wizard we've met with an instinct for secrecy. Harry has a finely-developed tendency in that direction himself. To say *nothing* of Albus. Let alone Severus Snape.

He may have developed a different "hand" in which to pass notes to Lily. They may even have used code names as well. Lily may have regarded it as a game. For Severus it was in deadly earnest.



Well. That was the theory. I'm a little sorry that it did not play out. Not that I had expected it to do so, you understand. It was always distinctly "out there."

And it's certainly not that I have any actual objection to the childhood friendship that Rowling ultimately gave us. A childhood friendship is much closer to the general caliber of relationship that I had envisioned than fanon's ghod-awful icky, sticky, unrequited teen crush. And since Rowling failed to give us any real clue at all as to the Evans sisters' socioeconomic or regional background, I cannot feel particularly at fault for failing to have anticipated it. A number of other fans did manage to do that. But I still think that was more in the nature of a lucky guess than anything that a reader might be able to have reasonably deduced from the text.

I just wish that Rowling had depicted that "friendship" as something a bit less abusive on Lily's part. But, then, we really do have to consider that perhaps Rowling *intended* that we should finally conclude that Harry's mother was no more of a bargain than his father, and that, indeed they deserved one another.



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Still, Severus Snape is not the kind of person who needs the threat of death via Unbreakable Vow in order to keep his promises. And at the point that he reported the partial Prophecy to Voldemort (which I sincerely believed was on Dumbledore's orders, and still believe was at his contrivance), NO ONE knew that the family threatened by it would turn out to be the Potters.

Once it was clear that the family (or one of the families) at risk was the Potters, I could very well believe that Snape profoundly regretted following that particular order. And this is a matter that would have become clear as soon as the Potters announced their impending parenthood.

There may be a reason why it took over a year for Voldemort to catch up to just who the Child of Prophecy might be. He may have taken the "seventh month" literally, and waited until the end of September to start hunting. (This may very well still hold true, not that we will ever be told as much. I place no dependence upon Rowling's alleged Encyclopedia giving us any answer that makes sense. From what I gather, the whole Pottermore project appears instead to be being floated as an attempt to rewrite the series after the fact without going to the — admittedly considerable — trouble of actually \*doing\* it.)

And at that point one wondered whether when Harry returned to Godric's Hollow he would find anything of his mother's correspondence.

The odds seemed against it. It turns out I ought to have been thinking of #12 Grimmauld Place instead.

But even if he did, I was sure the appearance of any such correspondence would be misleading. I was fully confident that Harry was not going to know Snape's real motivations until





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after their final confrontation at the end of the book.

But, yes, I did have to finally admit to the possibility that Snape and Lily might provide another echo along the continuum pertaining to Dumbledore's Men.



Nevertheless, I still think that there is a more than slight chance that the Pensieve incident we witnessed was the point at which Snape single-handedly derailed the whole budding romance between James and Lily, and it took James until 7th year to get it back on track. It may not have been until James was orphaned in his 7th year that Lily took pity on him. She does seem to have enjoyed positioning herself as Lady Bountiful. (Post-DHs, she must have developed a taste for it back in her playground days with Snape.)

I have long taken the view that the Snape/Marauders "war" was something that had grown out of Snape having shown up on the Marauders' radar as just too competent not to be regarded as competition. (ETA: It now turns out that he showed up on their radar as a long-haired sissy whose best friend was a girl, and who let the girl boss him around, too.)

Plus he was allegedly a Dark Arts geek, or, at any rate, he was pointed out to James as such by Sirius Black, and that factor attains the level of a certainly *if* we can believe Sirius Black when he claims Snape made the mistake of having let himself be taken up by the junior DEs crowd, thus arousing the enmity of Bella's young cousin and his friends. That would imply that the Snape/Marauder feud was well established before any of the participants had even noticed girls, and it did not need

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the opportunity for additional friction to keep the pot boiling. Lily, not being one of the Marauders, and Muggle-born to boot, could have been off on the sidelines of it. In the Pensieve junket Lily certainly didn't act as if she actually knew anything of Snape. Except, presumably, that he was the kid her housemates called "Snivellus," and that James Potter despised him.



And, indeed, I thought if there was any relationship between Snape and Lily at all, it was not a publicly visible one, since to the end of HBP there was absolutely no indication in the books that anyone had EVER noticed an open relationship of any kind between Lily and Snape. Which renders what Rowling has finally dumped on us in DHs totally implausible. Someone *ought* to have noticed *something*. We really ought to have been given something more than a passing reference from Petunia to the existence of some "awful boy" who told her sister about Dementors.

Remus Lupin's utter disbelief of Harry's reiteration of Dumbledore's "official" reason for trusting Snape, and Harry's comment that Snape couldn't have given a damn about his mother either since he called her a mudblood, certainly ought to have jogged Remus's memory to the contrary if there had been anything there to jog, at the very least.



But, back in theoryland, Severus probably would have appreciated the attention of a girl of the supposed caliber of Lily Evans. As well as the opportunity for privately scoring



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one in the eye on James-bloody-Potter. She, of course, would have believed that any resistance to her overtures, in spite of his giving back some small signs of mutual interest was because of her housemates, rather than his, and she may have fancied herself a later-day Juliette with a reluctant Romeo.

(The werewolf caper allegedly was successfully hushed up, we were originally told. Lily *ought* not to have known about it. That it later turns out she *did* know about it is a strong hint of her being *involved* in it at some level.)

Lily might even have made some catty comments in James's hearing on the subject. Messages on the general order of "dating MacClaggan," and James would have been frothing at the mouth over Evans's sudden interest in Snape of all people. (A factor of which Lily was perfectly aware, and may have taken some degree of personal satisfaction in. That would teach him to make her a part of a disgraceful public exhibition!)

But, once again, if Remus doesn't admit to remembering anything about it, then if anything did go on, either it wouldn't have taken place where the Marauders had a ringside seat to watch it, or Rowling is deliberately not playing fair with her readers.

James is unlikely to have confided in anyone other than, possibly, Sirius — which he might have done while they were away from Hogwarts. 6th year was the year that Sirius was living with the Potters during term breaks. And James couldn't very well do anything about the Lily situation after he'd blotted his copybook (or had it blotted for him by Sirius) over the werewolf caper itself.

The Marauders really ought to have all been on very thin ice with the faculty over Year 6, and James ought to have realized

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it, even if Sirius and Peter didn't. Even saving Snape's life didn't cancel out the crime of putting it in danger in the first place.

Particularly not in the *manner* that had been put in danger.

In any realistic scenario, the worst-case repercussions of that stunt could have sent shock waves all the way up to the Wizengamot. Plus James was probably having to head off Sirius's and Peter's attempts to continue open hostilities even after the werewolf debacle. I wouldn't have been surprised to discover that it was James's feat in successfully keeping those two in check for a year that got him his Head Boy appointment despite not being a Prefect. The Hogwarts staff would have been discretely watching them all.



Well. So much for semi-realistic scenarios. The little twerps seem to have actually *boasted* about it in the Gryffindor common room! Or had at least made sure that *Lily* was filled in on James's side of the story.



But we really were set up to suspect that some variety of an association existed. And I thought that if Book 7 did end up mirroring Book 3 the way that OotP copied the plotline of PS/SS, and HBP replayed so many elements and decorative motifs from CoS, then we could already see how all of the cast of characters had been deliberately positioned to gradually feed us the backstory of a Snape+Lily association over the course of Book 7 which would prove to be as crucial to the overriding backstory of the series as the James+Sirius one was in Book 3.



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The whole James and Sirius “double-act” was not even hinted at prior to PoA. It was fed to us in dribbs and drabs over the course of that book. And until the grand reveal/reversal at the run up to the climax NONE of it showed to Sirius’s advantage.

I was inclined to suspect that Snape+Lily would be the central element that Rowling had been saving up to wrap the Book 7=Book 3 redux around.

And I actually wasn’t *wrong* about that, although we got no long slow build-up of information, only the whole botched mess of the thing dumped on us at the next-to-last minute. But it was the long-term results of that association which enabled Lily to save Harry the first time. Oathbreakers do not prosper in the Potterverse. Ultimately it was the long-term effects of that association and those that it touched, that destroyed Tom Riddle.

And there was indeed such an association. And it mattered more than any mere teen crush.



Before DHs came out I suspected that such an association may have had a great deal more to do with *how* Lily managed to save Harry’s life the first time. But my reading on what was going on there was a lot more individualized than Rowling’s. (It also kept the participants in character.) Frankly, at the end of the series, I can believe that Voldemort inducts schoolboys into the DEs a lot more easily than that he would spare the life of a designated victim on the strength of one follower asking him to pretty-please not kill her.

But I was sure that Severus did know just how potentially important to the downfall of the Dark Lord baby Harry Potter

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(or Neville Longbottom) potentially was. And I was convinced that he also knew about the Horcruxes.

And, if my suspicions regarding that book collection in Spinner’s End had been correct, he may have known the “mechanics” of how Horcruxes are made.

Which, could also have been the mechanics of how to derail the process.

After all, the sort of offer and counter-offer by a willing sacrifice that we have been told saved Harry the first time (and which turns out to have been completely contradicted by the revelation of what Tom Riddle allegedly actually remembered of it) is the sort of exchange that you would be more likely to look for among the crude, chaotic interactions peculiar to “wild Magic” as it occurs within the Dark Arts than any of the orderly, disciplined spells and principles of “domestic” magic, or “wizardry,” as it is taught at Hogwarts, or sanctioned by the Ministry of Magic.

Mightn’t an association and/or partnership with a truly gifted young Dark wizard have been what gave Lily Potter the edge that enabled her to save her child?

It could have been.

At least in the hands of some other author.

(You wanted a Snape/Lily theory? Okay. There’s one. Made to order.)



I did think it was likely that the two may have never met face-to-face once they finished Hogwarts. Or, conversely, it was possible that they really were coworkers somewhere.



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Although I thought that if that was so Rowling would certainly tell us as much.

Instead, Rowling implies that Lily never forgave Snape for having once called her a name and never spoke to him again.

I thought they could have corresponded right up to the day that Lily and James went into hiding under a flawed Fidelius Charm.

But, in any case, We all believed that once she was Head Girl to James's Head Boy, James demonstrably managed to turn over a new leaf with her and make a better impression, for she did finally start dating him in 7th year. This time, on her terms.

What is more, at some point within a year after finishing Hogwarts, James, having lost both of his parents to some magical malady during the previous year, and finding himself alone in the world, and I think, not much liking it, popped the question.

And, Reader, she married him.

But, realistically, there was no indication anywhere in canon up to the end of HBP to support the view that Lily Evans and Severus Snape ever had anything more in common than a couple of years of NEWT-level Potions classes.

But they did unquestionably have that.

And if there was anything significant beyond that, I still trusted that Rowling would eventually make sure that we learned of it.

It's a pity that, however fed up with this story she might have been by that time, that over the course of bringing it to a conclusion, she couldn't be bothered to make what she chose to tell us either believable as a friendship, or have any of the cast of characters involved come across as likable human beings..

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**Which is to say: that bloody Potions book.**

The half-blood Prince's Potions book ultimately turned out to be yet another of Rowling's lengthening list of shoddily-built, disposable plot devices which was evidently designed to be used in one book and dispensed with. But, given the amount of attention drawn to it, for a couple of years we thought the inherent contradictions concerning it meant something, and that it actually might be relevant to the future development of the whole story arc. It was driving everybody crazy.

And no wonder. Rowling actually handed us several completely irresolvable conundrums in HBP. And the Prince's Potions book is only one of them.

Or at any rate, the contradictions were irresolvable with the information that we had at the end of HBP. And nothing related to any of them was addressed satisfactorily in DHs, either.

At the time I suspected that either we were overlooking some key factor that would snap everything into focus, or Rowling had withheld the keys to these puzzles until book 7. And either possibility seemed as likely as the other at that point.

Instead, once DHs was released, so far as the Potions book goes, the answer turned out to be behind door #3. It's Rowling's same old game of bait-and-switch again. She threw the idea of the potions book together to grease the wheels of the HBP plot, and tie the story arc together, then never referred to it again, and didn't even bother to double-check whether what she told us about it added up.

Which it doesn't. It never will. She doesn't bloody care, since she's finished with it. And her editors never cared to begin with. So it's up to us to either forget about the whole thing, or to try



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to make sense of it ourselves.

Frankly, I'm tempted to roll it into the essay devoted to some of the other blatant bits of fakery in the series. Because in the end, the "mystery" of the potions book was another piece of plotting which appears to have been totally fake.



**N**o matter what angle you try to approach the "Prince's" Potions book from, there always seems to be at least one factor left over that does not fit into the nice tidy picture you are trying to piece together. Rather like when one has assembled the toy, and there is an extra piece left in the box, and you have no idea of where it is supposed to fit. Or you have almost finished the jigsaw and there is only one gap and only one piece left, and the piece you've got just plain Does Not Fit into the hole. It is as bad as trying to figure out how Reggie Black got the Horcrux out of the sea cave.

In fact, it is *exactly* like trying to figure out how Reggie Black got the Horcrux out of the sea cave.

(Answer: he didn't. Kreachur did.)

The adventure of Reggie Black and the Dark Lord's Sea Cave is another unsolvable puzzle that Rowling dropped on us in HBP. And the answer she gave us for that one in DHs doesn't add up to a rational picture either. Before DHs came out I had finally come to the conclusion that it was a trick question. And, furthermore, that it was a whopping red herring and that we did not *need* to know how Reggie got the Horcrux out of the cave, or even *if* he got it out of the cave. And it seems that I was right.

But at the end of HBP it really did appear that we needed

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to figure out just what was going on with that Potions book. I wasn't the only one who suspected that we'd not seen the last of that book. Although even then, it was always possible that the issue might also have turned out to be a trick question. Just not the same trick.

Because, at that point, it very much looked like the other shoe had not dropped yet. Or not if what I was reading in the books was actually *in* the books.

It should probably also be noted at this point that just as with the Grand Contradiction between Albus's and Sybil's conflicting accounts of the events of the night Trelawney's first Prophecy was made (another of HBP's irresolvable contradictions), quite a lot of fans see no contradictions regarding the Potions book, either. The determination of fans to believe that Rowling did not put into her books elements which are clearly in the books bemuses me, but I find it difficult to quite accept the theory that JKR indulges in "automatic writing" and isn't aware of what is in the books herself. Although post-DHs I think I may have cause to wonder about that.

She certainly indulges in *sloppy* writing. And even sloppier planning. Her editors did her no favors by letting her get away with it, either. The contradictions are *there*, dammit. And telling me to just ignore the snakes behind the curtain doesn't make them crawl away.



So, what are the problems I had with the Potions book? Why do I think the information refuses to add up?

Well, point 1; none of the kids recognized the handwriting,



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even though Snape has presumably been scrawling comments across their essays for the past six years. And Rowling deliberately made a point of calling the handwriting to our attention, since — once the kids have concluded that the book was Snape's — Harry (I think) popped out with the statement that *Slughorn* would have recognized the handwriting. (Even though it had been 20 years since Slughorn had any of the Marauder cohort in his classroom. The kids had still been sitting in Snape's (DADA) classroom up to that week).

And, just for good measure; it was also stated quite clearly that there was only *one* person's handwriting in that book. And that one person's handwriting was *all over* that book. (It should also be noted that although Rowling had Harry being given hand-delivered messages all year long, the only one from Snape was delivered verbally. No physical note to compare the handwriting in the book to.)

This, on its own, can be worked around. For one thing, the Potions essays which get returned dripping with red ink are fanon, not canon. And the writing that regularly appears on the chalkboard appears at the wave of a wand. We don't know whether what shows up on the board is Snape's own script, or (as now seems likely) whether it is some standardized script generated by the spell. We also know that Snape has reinvented his posture, his mannerisms, his accent, almost certainly his vocabulary, and the state of his wardrobe since he was sixteen, so it isn't beyond reason to assume that he reinvented his handwriting as well. And Harry did catch a glimpse of Snape's 16-year-old handwriting back in the Pensieve junket of Year 5, and it was tiny and cramped, as was the script of the annotations and



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spell notes in the book. But the fact that the writing in the book was not recognizable as Snape's current script was deliberately inserted, and then called to our attention, and waved under our noses through the whole volume, so we cannot lightly blow it off. Especially since now it just appears to be disingenuous. And that is not something that you like to see from an author that you would like to be able to trust.

Point 2; another contradiction that Rowling dropped in, and then later brought to our attention a *second* time, just in case we had missed it, was the fact that we saw James Potter use *Levicorpus*, nonverbally, in the Marauder cohort's 5th year.

At the end of HBP Rowling has Snape claiming *Levicorpus* as one of his *own* spells. That he invented it. And that James Potter had turned it against him. This flatly does not add up to finding the spell notes for it in his 6th year potions text.

If the spell was Snape's, it unquestionably got away from him at some point in *5th* year. We watched James Potter use it for the entertainment of the student body at the end of Year 5, during the week the Marauders were sitting the OWLs. Remus Lupin expands on this later by claiming that there was a whole fad for that particular spell for some months during their 5th year, so it had to have gotten away quite some time before the day that we saw James Potter using it.

And *Levicorpus* is a *nonverbal* spell. It appears to have been *developed* as a nonverbal spell. You couldn't have learned it by overhearing someone else use it. Not if they performed it correctly.

What I think is that Rowling over-egged the pudding and tried to use the potions book as a vehicle for too many things.





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It would have played better if she had left it at Sectumsempra being the spell that Snape refused to have turned against him, and left Levicorpus out of it.

Because you can fairly easily make an argument for the spell notes for Levicorpus being scribbled in a 6th year textbook if it was *not* originally one of Snape's own spells.

There definitely had been "a" nonverbal levitation spell which showed up in the Marauder cohort's 5th year. In a hypothetical iteration of the events which was better planned, it could even have been one of the Marauder's *own* prank spells. Indeed, Lupin's amusement regarding it when Harry brought the subject up strongly suggested that it was. Therefore, Snape's notes in his following year's textbook could have been represented his attempts to reverse-engineer it.

Frankly, magic in the Potterverse comes across as being rather like Photoshop. There are very few instances wherein an effect can only be achieved by one method in Photoshop. Levicorpus may very well have been Snape's deconstruction of the (unnamed) nonverbal levitation spell. But the fact that Harry had discussed the spell with Remus by name, and Remus recognized it, months after Harry got into Snape's Pensieve and saw James use it nonverbally argues against that.

Actually, if the form of the spell which uses the incantation "Levicorpus" was indeed Snape's own spell, the real clanker in the continuity was for Remus to recognize the spell *by name*. If Rowling had cared about making things add up, instead of issuing wild, sweeping statements for her puppets to spout on command, she would have had Harry *describe* what the spell did and have Lupin recognize *that*. If she'd done that, there would

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have been no conflict with Snape later claiming it, since *that* form of the spell *would* have been his own.

But now it already feels like we are beginning to drift down the stream of Too Many Unconfirmed Explanations. You shouldn't have to stop and explain (let alone invent) the necessary technology in order to make a theory work. Explanations should only be necessary when you are trying to develop a unified theory of things of which you are already aware.

Of all the experimental spells recorded in that book, Snape only appears to directly claim ownership of Levicorpus and Sectumsempra. Those alone would be enough to imply that the book was his. Which he confirms in that same final confrontation. Nor is that accidental. We were *supposed* to discover that the book was Snape's. Now he *also* claims to be the Half-Blood Prince of the book's inscription (and just how lame is that inscription?). Any of that information ought to clinch the matter.



Somehow, for a great many fans it doesn't. Which right there is a strong hint that the readers are not convinced. An astounding amount of effort has been put into trying to argue that the book and the notes are someone else's. But it takes far too much straining at gnats to come up with any alternative to their being Snape's which is even remotely viable. I thought this might be a deliberate bit of misdirection on Rowling's part. But as to what it was misdirecting us *from* I hesitated to take a stand. Now, I just think it was shoddy writing and not being able to develop a viable timeline..



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She certainly never offered us any convincing reason for *why* it was suddenly important that Harry should learn that the book had been Snape's. By the time he discovered that, Harry didn't really *care* who the Prince was. Indeed, the whole "mystery" of the identity of the Half-Blood Prince served primarily as a distraction from the fact that Rowling didn't actually *have* a story to tell us all regarding Year 6. Only a grand, sweeping, flashy climax for the end of it.

We watched James Potter use something that looked to us like Levicorpus. That is the only spell out of the Potions book that we ever thought we saw James or Sirius use. All of their other spells in that particular encounter were standard ones which we had met before, and all of those were performed verbally, too. Levicorpus (if that's what it was) was the only exception.

Upon consideration, this suggests that my first assumption; that Snape was given the Lovegood treatment, and had his book stolen, and never got it back, could be a long way off-target. That reading is suddenly very much in our way. Nor is it actually supported in the text, however likely it might have appeared to be at first glance.

In the first place, there are just too many annotations in that Potions book, all closely reflecting the progress of Slughorn's standard 6th year lesson plan for the book not to have been being used throughout Slughorn's 6th year Potions class by *somebody*. And those annotations are *all* in what has retroactively been declared to be young Snape's handwriting.

So it is a lot easier to believe — if we are forced to conclude that the spell was Snape's own and not his reconstruction of a

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different spell which did the same thing — that one *spell* got away from Snape, rather than that he lost his book, got it back, and then as a teacher either kept it in the classroom cupboard — when his own NEWT-Level classes may not even have used that textbook — rather than taking it home and keeping it among his own possessions, or that he lost the book, got it back, and then later lost it again, permanently. *And* that in all of that back-and-forthing, nobody saw the Half-Blood Prince inscription and gave him grief for it. (ETA: I guess post DHs we are now supposed to assume that Snape simply taught the spell to Avery and "Mulciber" to curry favor, and it somehow got away from them. I don't buy that variant, either.)



So, for theory's sake, during the period between HBP and DHs my tentative reading of the situation was that Levicorpus (not merely something that looked like it) was somehow lifted from the collection by a person or persons unknown. Most probably by another Slytherin, who would certainly have had the best opportunity to come across the book in the dorms and sneak a peek when he may have had a free period and Snape was off in Ancient Runes or Arithmancy class or some such. That, furthermore, it was this unknown person who carelessly managed to turn the spell loose, and like a bad cold it managed to work its way through the whole student body over the course of a school term or two. Well, okay. Not impossible, anyway. Not being impossible is a Good Thing. It's just not a *sure* thing. There is no way that we are ever going to manage to dig out a sure thing on this subject.



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If we are limited to people whose existence and presence we are already aware of for this function, my vote goes to Reggie Black.

I'd accepted that it was Snape's book, possibly (but not certainly, and certainly not *necessarily*) that it had also been his mother's, and that he had been taking it to school with him since about 3rd year or so and reading it in the dorm (and thinking up better methods of brewing the examples? Maybe). He was also jotting his spell notes in the margins by 3rd or 4th year. Which is why he ended up keeping it with him at school, even though he didn't need it for class yet. It had his spell notes in it. Many of the potions notes didn't get added until he was actually using the book in class.

But it was a NEWT-level text, so he wasn't carrying it around in his school bag during the day. It was presumably tucked up safely in the dorm during the day. He probably usually kept it in his trunk. But there were may have been times that he went off to class and left in on the bed or on his bedside table.

Well in Snape's 5th year, Regulus Black was a 2nd year, still taking only the basic course load with no electives (the dates from the Black family tapestry sketch are unworkable and have been modified to add up to numbers that match what we were given to work from in the course of Kreachur's story. i.e., 1963–1980). This would mean that he had some free time while the older students were off in classes. Reggie Black also has a demonstrated track record of learning things that other people would rather that he not know about.

Not that nonverbal magic qualifies. Nonverbal magic is required of all students once they reach NEWT-level, and a

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child from a wizarding family (which Harry effectively is not) would probably know that. James Potter was using nonverbal magic at the end of his 5th year, if you remember.

And it is a really short distance for the spell to have traveled from Reggie (who was in the best position to have learned it) to the Marauders (who unquestionably used it).

Regulus as I say, was a 2nd year in the Marauder's 5th. I think Narcissa had finished school the year before. To the best of our knowledge, Sirius and Regulus were the last members of the Black family still at Hogwarts at that point.

Sirius had his own little group of cronies. We don't know who was in Reggie's year. It isn't likely at this point that we are ever going to be told.

Sirius had not yet left home, so the blood relationship between the brothers was not yet being discounted by either of them.

Mental Exercise: What is likely to be the interaction between that particular pair of brothers on those occasions that they crossed one another's path? Does Sirius come across as the sort of elder brother who grandly ignores the small fry, or is he the sort who makes a point of putting them in their place, just because they exist, and there is no one around to stop him?

Remember also, Sirius had backup. Also; if Sirius considered it acceptable tactics to habitually take Snape on at 4:1 odds in his own favor, how much would he have hesitated to lean on his own brother who is 3 years younger than himself (and who therefore is his own to needle, by his right of being the eldest)? And just to make it all the more tempting, Reggie is (it is assumed) their parents' favorite. And they are now at Hogwarts, where their parents cannot interfere.



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Reggie would have had little difficulty poking about in the 5th year dorm of his own House while Snape was in class. He might well have wondered why Snape had a NEWT-Level text when he hadn't even sat the OWLs yet, and checked it out, discovering the spell notes. At this point the book is not yet swimming in Potions notes, many of which were only added once the book was in use in class the following year. There is not so much else in the margins yet to detract from the spell notes. Reggie decides he has found a treasure trove.

Now, I think that it is not that much of a stretch to suspect that a kid who with the probable help of his own family library had unquestionably figured out existence of the banned subject of Horcruxes at 17 just might already know about nonverbal spell-casting at 12. That doesn't mean that he was *capable* of nonverbal casting at 12. If you remember, Harry was having trouble nonverbally casting spells that he already knew at 16. But, at the same time, just because a spell was developed to work nonverbally does not mean that it *won't* work verbally as well. The next time Sirius decided to harass Reggie...

Of course Sirius was not alone. James and/or Peter grabbed Reggie or petrified him, made him turn Sirius loose, and they all put the pressure on him about where he got that spell. (Lupin does not *admit* to knowing where the spell came from, so we might assume that he was not present. We might also just assume that he is still covering up for a gang of bullies.) Reggie says he got it "out of a book" and probably lets the information out about the "[nvbl]" notation, unless *he* had used it nonverbally and gave away that bit of info unintentionally. He manages not to let any of Snape's other spells loose, however.



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And gets away as quickly as he can. If Regulus was somehow unaware of the significance of the notation, one of the Marauders, who are 3 years older, and at least two of them purebloods raised inside the ww and familiar with its practices, realizes that "nvbl" means nonverbal.

Snape eventually traces this leak back to its source once he sees his own spell used by someone in public, which would have happened soon enough. We do not know what the upshot was between Snape and Reggie, but if Snape had been crushing on Narcissa (and he was of a reasonable age to have been, the age difference between Snape and Narcissa is the same as that between Ron and Fleur), he may have let Reggie off easily. We do not know what their relationship was after that, but we were never given any indication that it was close, regardless of whatever it may have been.

Levicorpus may not have been the only spell that escaped from the book, but it was the one that escaped Reggie and rampaged through the school. One really does wonder what Snape had to say of the matter, but in any case, from that point, Reggie Black would have certainly shown up above Snape's horizon, even if he was 3 years younger.

And, at the very least, if Reggie had "stolen" his spell and used it in public, and let it escape, Snape would have had reason to believe that he ought to keep an eye on him.



However; we are already up to multiple secondary considerations that have to be explained away before we can simply accept the information that has been handed to us about that





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book. We cannot just accept it as a matter of course, because there are too many glitches in the way it's presented. Here's yet another, even bigger one:

Point 3; the book appeared to be mixed in with Slughorn's loaner copies.

No. I do not accept the explanation that Snape would have finished school and abandoned his textbook. Not after he went to the trouble of filling it with his annotations and spell notes.

And, no, I don't believe that he would have brought it to school when he came back as a teacher and put it in the classroom cupboard and forgotten about it, either. If he wanted to refer to those annotations during the course of developing his lesson plans, he would have put it in his desk. And probably locked the drawer. Or kept it in his office, or in his own quarters. And he would certainly not have left it in the cupboard after he was finally appointed to the DADA position and needed to clear his stuff out of the Potions classroom to make way for Slughorn.

So, did he lose the book some time after 6th year and never get it back? Or are we — and Harry — being played?

Given that these contradictions have been handed to us, and, for the most part, called to our attention a second time, by an author with a track record for leading her readers up the garden path, I thought that it was worth considering that we could all be being played.

For one thing, we know that Snape's OWL-level classes do not use Borage as a text. We have no idea whether he ever used it for his NEWT-level text either. Given the amount of corrections and improvements he managed to make to the informa-

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tion in it, he may very well not have. Not that we'll ever be told one way or another. But if he did not use it, there would have been no reason for why a copy of it would have been in the cupboard in the classroom, unless Slughorn put it there when *he* returned to teach Potions.

It is my opinion, stated elsewhere, repeatedly, that we were handed some very flashy and very bogus answers for things over the course of HBP.

We were handed the "official" Riddle backstory. In fact we were invited to believe that we now knew everything about the life of Tom Marvolo Riddle.

— Except for any reason why he ever made the choices he did. By the time we and Albus caught up to him when he was 11, those choices were long made and he was already well down the road his life has since taken, and we haven't a clue *why*.

We also got all our expectations regarding Severus Snape's function in the series turned upside down, and I didn't think it was for the last time, either.

So it would not have surprised me in the least to learn that there was something more, or something other to that Potions book that Harry and we had all missed.

Or that we just didn't have the necessary information to solve the puzzle about it yet.



Which didn't keep people from trying. There was a swarm of theories regarding that Potions book. One of the most popular was that it was originally his mother Eileen's book. Many Snape-haters go further and claim that the potions annotations



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were hers as well, and that it was she who inscribed the book when she passed it on to him. None of which really makes sense. Particularly since he openly claims the spells in that book, there is only one person's handwriting in that book, and the spell notes are in the same hand as the potions annotations.

Well, okay, sure, the book *could* have been Eileen's old one. In fact, it probably was, but there isn't any "bang" in that, so why bother? That might explain why he had it at least a year before he needed it. But is that even a necessary detail? The "almost 50 years old" printing date takes the book right out of the Riddle era at Hogwarts, and when you stop and consider the business, it really doesn't matter who originally owned it. If it was Snape's while he was in school, it wasn't necessarily Eileen's. Eileen may not have even taken NEWT-Level Potions. Having it be Eileen's old book is nice, but it doesn't really add anything to the dynamic. It could just as easily have been any old used book. Slughorn has been using that book in his classes for over 30 years (50 years, in fact. At least). He's still using it. Snape only needed to have possession of that copy by his 5th year. And he could have picked it up 2nd hand at any point, knowing that he was going to be needing it eventually anyway.

For that matter, a theory which I never heard floated, but makes as much sense as anything else, would be that Snape had managed to test out of one or other of his earlier years in Potions and was allowed to take 6th year potions in his 5th year. Just because we never heard of that being done only means that Harry wasn't interested enough to register it.

But I certainly don't insist on that, since it doesn't really add anything of significance to the solution of the overall puzzle, either.

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Another popular theory, which I do think has a fighting chance of being in the right ballpark, even if the details are still waving in the breeze, unsupported, is that it was Albus who engineered Slughorn's having the book sitting in his cupboard for the express purpose of giving it to Harry.

Looked at dispassionately, the most unlikely circumstance of all the various contradictions regarding the book is probably the fact that Severus Snape's old Potions book was sitting there in Slughorn's cupboard and available to be handed over to just anybody in the first place. If we are going to be listing things that make no sense whatsoever...

(Coincidence, my arse. There is no way that book would have been in that cupboard by *coincidence*.)

And it's not as if no one had any idea that Potter might be showing up without Slughorn's assigned text or a Potions kit. Everyone knew of Snape's policy of accepting only students who scored Os in their OWLs into his advanced class. It would have been simple enough for Albus to have discovered that Potter had scraped an E, but no O, and that Harry would therefore not have believed that he would be permitted to take the class (Remember that Dumbledore was able to say with great confidence that the OWL results would be arriving later in the day that he deposited Harry with the Weasleys for the summer). And if anyone was still dithering about in any uncertainty, they could have always asked Molly. The boy had been living with the Weasleys almost all summer, and they had all gone off to purchase their required supplies together. Having



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the book ready and waiting for him would be an easy fix for the old manipulator to have had in place before Harry even boarded the Hogwarts Express. This might even make a nice companion piece to Dumbledore's giving Harry his father's cloak back in Book 1.

Particularly if Snape had at some point given the book to Lily, and it was recovered from the house at Godric's Hollow. Although given that Snape would have had to do so after he'd taken 6th year Potions and Lily was no longer speaking to him by then, that interpretation is not very likely.



If Rowling weren't so insistent upon Albus keeping Tom's secrets for him, I'd say that Albus and Snape had drafted out a strategy based on giving Potter access to that book in hopes that if he performed well in Slughorn's class, Slughorn might be at least a bit more inclined to turn over that memory to him.

Actually, I could very well believe that Albus might have roped Snape in on such a plan without giving up Tom's secrets. Sit him down and tell him that he was sure that Horace knew something about Riddle which might be a great help in figuring out how to deal with him, but that whatever it was, even all these years later, Horace was too upset about it to share the information.

Or, rather, that he wouldn't share the information with *Albus*. And if not Albus, he probably wouldn't share it with Snape either (which suggests that Horace is not unacquainted with Occlumency, or Albus might have tasked Snape with retrieving that memory). But that perhaps Horace might turn

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it over to *Harry*, if Harry managed to impress him, since Lily had been so much of a favorite of Horace's.

Snape would have disabused Albus of there being any chance of that, given the boy's lackluster performance in *his* class. Albus might have pointed out that the boy's OWL score had been a Exceeds Expectation, was there any way of giving him an edge?



Frankly, by this time I've scaled back my expectations to the point of being three-quarters convinced that the whole point of passing that book to Harry was just to assure that Harry would have enough of an edge to win the potions prize of Slughorn's (almost certainly traditional) brewing contest for his new crop of NEWT-level students.

I rather think that Albus would think it a Very Good Thing if Harry had access to a 1oz. dose of Felix Felicis on hand "just in case."

And I suspect Horace would have had no objections to facilitating *that*.

Snape, on the other hand probably did. He knew that there was more than potions notes in that book, and not everything he'd put in there was harmless. And if Albus had assured him that he'd have his book back once a new copy was ordered for Potter, I think it would have ended in a fine session of "I told you so" when Harry returned the battered cover with a fresh, clean, *new* inside. With a fine reprise of both chorus and verse after the Sectumsempera incident.

I'm sure that did *nothing* to improve Professor Snape's stress levels that year.



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Whatever tale Slughorn might have been told to have him gleefully passing the book on to Harry is uncertain. A comment that Lily had a fair amount of input on the notes in the margins — which for the spell notes was very probably the case — might have been enough to have Slughorn happily giving the boy a memento of his mother.

But if passing the book to Harry was deliberate, then I originally believed that there was almost guaranteed to be some specific information in that book that Albus wanted Harry to have access to. And at the end of HBP I didn't think that Harry had found it yet.

Which would also imply that Albus might be familiar with the contents of that book too, and that, somehow, Snape had agreed to allow it to be passed on to Potter, unlikely as that may seem. Hermione's pronouncement that Snape would not want Dumbledore to know about the book, even by the time she said it sounded like perfect rubbish. Snape was officially a Death Eater, for heaven's sake! Why would Albus have cared about a collection of (exemplary!) potions notes and a few dozen homemade hexes that Snape invented as a teenager falling into Harry's hands?

One of my former questions used to be: could that be what Snape and Dumbledore were arguing about, that Hagrid overheard? About, say maybe, Snape continuing to permit Harry to use the book, use his hexes, and cheat his way through Potions class, taking credit for Snape's work? Harry had used the toenail hex on Crabbe by the middle of Autumn term. Snape



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would have recognized that one if it was reported to him. He would have recognized others as well. Especially Muffliato, if it showed up in his DADA classroom.

Another thing this reading would have implied is that Slughorn was in on the fix and would have reported to Albus that Potter had changed the cover and turned in the fresh copy rather than the graffitied one.

And, really, when the Sectumsempera incident took place in May, Snape didn't need to do much hunting to find confirmation of what he suspected, did he? If he had been a party to facilitating Potter's use of that book (even against his better judgment, and over his objections) he would have hardly needed to search extensively for the cause, would he?

And as for Snape's rhetorical question as to who taught Potter such dark magic; we all watched Snape dancing all around a different set of truths and half-truths all through Chapter 2, so why should we assume that he didn't already know perfectly well the answer to the question? For that matter, throughout the whole series, he usually *does* already know the answers to any questions he asks Harry. Or is convinced he does, anyway. And typically he is more likely to be right than otherwise.

For that matter, it makes almost as much sense to postulate that Snape hid the book in the Room of Requirement himself (which I say he probably knew about, or the kids camping in there over the course of DHs might have had more difficulties than they did), Albus retrieved it, passed it to Slughorn, who palmed it off on Harry who returned it to the Room. Sheesh!





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For the record, I'm sticking with the theory that the whole point of Harry being slipped that book was just to facilitate his winning that prize of a 10z. dose of Felix Felicis.



A much more “out there” — but fun — theory which cropped up on one of my discussion boards was the notion that Snape and Lily had worked together on those potions notes and that Snape had charmed the book with a For Your Eyes Only charm, so that apart from himself, only Lily could read the annotations. And as we have been told repeatedly, Harry does have Lily's eyes. Neither Ron nor Hermione were able to decipher the Prince's handwriting, were they? (Well, Ron couldn't. Hermione wouldn't try.)

For that matter; once one disentangles the Snape + Lily concept from the widely received Snape-loved-Lily fanon theory one really needs to re-examine rather a lot of the ideas that various people have floated in aid of that inaccurate theory to check whether they have any merit on their own, and the suggestion that the Potions book was originally Lily's — even if she wasn't the one who wrote in it — begins to look as if it almost might. It should be pointed out that this theory was another one frequently deployed by the die-hard Snape-haters who cannot stand the idea that Snape was ever good at anything. But that doesn't happen to be where I am coming from. The book was certainly Snape's, and it is well within reason to suspect that quite possibly it had been Eileen's. Which would mean that it was available all through those kids' childhood.

Consider...



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It very much belatedly (as in, not until the year 2020!) occurs to me that Potions is a magical study which is not tracked by the Ministry.

Regardless of how underaged the potioneer.

Potions brewing is not registered by the trace, regardless of whether the trace is applied to the wand, or to the child.

Both Snape \*and Lily\* were remarkably good at Potions.

Can you say “summer projects?”

I certainly can. Professor Snape's assigned OWL-level textbook covers more than one year. Even if that copy of Borage wasn't Eileen's originally, Lily had pocket money. The pair of them probably had access to Borage long before they needed it.

Which would have given Severus a widely accepted excuse to spend as much of his time as possible with Lily during the summer. I can't see him turning that down. Even if only to get away from Tobias and Eileen for the day.

For that matter, maybe the potions notes only *looked* like they were following Slughorn's lesson plans. Maybe Snape and Lily had been working their way through Borage a couple of years early. The potions notes might have already been in the book by the time Snape was sitting in 6th year Potions. Indeed, maybe Snape blew off a fair amount of class time in 6th year doodling spells in the margins because he had already covered the material.

It might be interesting to know whether Lily's potions expertise continued at the same high level once she got into NEWT-level classes, since she'd dumped her unofficial partner. But she probably did her own solitary research, and kept her skills sharp.





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So long as we are still (long after the fair) drifting aimlessly down the stream of Too Many Explanations; at the end of HBP, what did we know, I mean really know about the Evans sisters' upbringing?

Maybe we ought to look at the same thing through one of the opposing viewpoints.

We've never heard of any other siblings. And their parents no longer seem to be alive, although at the end of the series Lily would still not yet have turned 40 if she had lived. I don't get the idea that Petunia was much older. And Petunia may even have been the younger sister.

We know that Lily, at least, made a very "good" marriage, from a worldly standpoint. Maybe Petunia "married-up" as well. We'd always assumed that Lily and Petunia were brought up middle-class, since Petunia and Vernon Dursley clearly seem to be middle-class. Maybe we were wrong. Maybe they were originally as working class as Snape — although probably a bit more prosperous. (Which might explain some of Petunia's social anxieties over what everyone who sees them might think of her family, and her determination to keep up with the Joneses, mightn't it?)

There really isn't anything to say that Lily mightn't have gone off to school with some 2nd-hand textbooks of her own, even if the family was middle-class. Flourish & Blotts sells 2nd-hand textbooks. It would have been easy enough for her to find them. Particularly if Lily, Like Hermione, was effectively given money for school supplies and turned loose to buy them on her own. We never caught a glimpse of the Grangers after CoS, except at Kings Cross. Lily may have decided to buy 2nd-hand where



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she could, and maximize her pocket money. And she seems to have been interested enough in the subject of Potions that she might very well have fudged her funds to buy a cheap copy of the Advanced text a year or two early.

And if it was her book, then it was probably her writing (well, post-DHs we know it wasn't. Her writing resembled Harry's). Snape's teenaged handwriting may have been similar, but it does not mean it was the same. Just because Harry is convinced that the hexes were invented by a bloke, doesn't mean they were. Once I was reconsidering such things, Harry's track record isn't so great that one can completely dismiss Hermione's comment that the handwriting looked like a girl's to her. And since it appears to be inarguable that *none* of the trio recognized the handwriting as Snape's, when he's presumably been scrawling comments across their essays for 5–6 years that may have been a clue rather than a logic hole.

And, now that one considers it, there are rather a lot of annotations in that book for it to all have been the work of only one person, aren't there? Even if only one person was the scribe.

Regardless of whose book and whose handwriting it was, I thought it very likely that the two of them might have worked out those notes together. In another universe, where the two of them remained on good terms I could easily see Lily suppressing a giggle and dutifully recording "Just shove a bezoar down it's throat" after Snape muttered it to her under his breath during Slughorn's lecture, under cover of Muffliato.

I'll bet Sluggo let the two of them get away with murder in his class. If, that is, the Gryffs and the Slyths shared Potions class in the Marauder's day. They may not have.





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It was rather a fun idea anyway.



But the hexes were Snape's.

Or, at any rate, Levicorpus and Sectumsempera were his. He claims them both, in full view of the audience.

But it does not necessarily follow that the spells were *all* his. If this extrapolation of a cooperative effort over a number of years was on the right track, I thought Snape and Lily might have worked a good many of those out together as well. After all, they had a pack of bullying toe-rags to oppose.

We also weren't told that Lily basically refused Snape's apologies and kicked him to the curb until quite late in DHs. During the time between HBP and DHs it was not that difficult to assume that they had patched it up at some point. Ron has had blow-ups with Harry that were a lot worse, and Harry has always forgiven Ron.

And while we are at it, who says Lily was a charter member of the pure-hearts club; so above-it-all that nothing Dark could touch her? I thought the Madonna!Lily iteration was obsolete by now. I get the distinct picture, post-HBP, that Lily Evans was perfectly willing to try out most of whatever was out there. (Bring it on!)

Bright, brave, funny, that's what they say. Very pretty and popular, too. And the answer that Rowling gave when someone called her on Petunia's statement about Lily turning teacups into rats was that Lily got "a few" warning notices; she liked to "push the envelope." In fact I think those are the exact words that Rowling used, too. (The MoM must have been a bit more



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lenient about that kind of thing in Lily's day, Harry only got 1 warning, and next time was up against a full disciplinary hearing, but then he had political enemies inside the Ministry itself.)

So, that being the case, I can easily see Lily creating clever hexes, *particularly* if she was hanging out with Snape. I can see the two of them in a spirited little competition to create the cleverest one, too. Hexes are not looked down upon or disapproved of in the ww. After all, it was a Bat-boogy hex that drew Sluggy's attention to Ginny Weasley.

I don't think that the ones they created were all Dark hexes, either. Most of them were described as clever and inventive, not as Dark. For that matter, Levicorpus doesn't really sound particularly Dark, does it?

There are a lot of spell notes in the margins of that book, and a few of them are probably Dark ones, but only a few — and we *still* haven't got an official statement on what constitutes "Dark." If it was Lily's book, and Lily was the scribe, she certainly wrote down her own, and the ones they worked on together, and evidently wrote down his as well. And he was aware of it and didn't mind. After all, he was showing them off to impress her.

And, excuse me, but any girl who will turn your teacup into a rat would certainly be capable of hexing your toenails into talons.

And as for Levicorpus, which was demonstrably created at least a year before NEWT-Level, goes; Harry concluded that one must have given its inventor a lot of trouble. There were a lot of cross-outs and false starts on that one.

And then suddenly there in a corner of the page was the spell





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written out clean with the (nvbl) notation. Complete with the counter-spell.

There is no single way to interpret that. The two most likely probabilities, so far as I could see at that point, are that either someone was working it out in 5th year (in their own copy of a book that they might not need until the following year) — or someone was trying to duplicate, or reverse-engineer a spell they'd seen used (possibly the previous year, or seen it more than once) but hadn't ever heard spoken aloud.

And then someone else looked at what they were doing and told them the answer.

And possibly, that someone also gave her the other unknown spell, the one that she had seen him use on James. Because in the Pensieve incident, we did see Snape use what was probably a mild Sectumsempera on James.



Most of the spells did look like they were actually worked out in the margins of the book itself however, not simply copied from somewhere else (although after the impromptu duel with Malfoy, Harry was wondering where the Prince had copied out a spell like Sectumsempera from, suggesting that there weren't any spell notes or jottings accompanying that one). If we hadn't all seen Levicorpus used the year before we'd all have easily been convinced that all of the spells were all worked out in 6th or 7th year. But Rowling made sure that we do not have that particular "comfort zone" from which to view our options. (ETA: which seems to have been a piece of sheer carelessness on her part. And that of her editors. The incident could have

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been set up without including that glitch.)

Which in itself suggested that, yes, we were deliberately handed a puzzle to work out.

In that case, the answer just wasn't likely to be anything quite as obvious as that the book was simply Snape's old textbook and no one else had ever gotten a close look at it. This whole issue had as many variables and built-in contradictions as that frapping "Reggie Black and the Dark Lord's Sea Cave" adventure. And I didn't think it happened by accident.

At that point I also still had some faith in Rowling's ability to plan out a story, so, I thought she must have *meant* it to be contradictory and confusing. Or at least so I thought *then*.

Well, no such luck. Rowling seems to have traveled deeply into the land of burnout by that time and was no longer passing out puzzles to her readers. Anything in the last three books that looks like a puzzle was more likely to be evidence of sheer carelessness, compounded by a pernicious lack of competent editing.

For that matter, by the time DHs was pending release I was pretty sure that the Sea Cave was a whopping red herring and that the most likely answer to emerge so far regarding that puzzle was that Reggie Black was never there at all.

But the issue of the potions book couldn't be so easily dismissed. Because the book clearly existed, and appeared to still be actively in play. Someone clearly spent a lot of time scribbling in it. And there are just too many anomalies to conclude that the information had to have only been from Snape and nobody else ever knew about it.

But like everything *else* to do with the matter of Snape and Lily, the official timing was all wrong for the standard interpretations.



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Including the ones that Rowling insisted on throwing at us.



So why mess with it at all?

Well, I'll admit that enhancing Lily's rôle — which we were consistently led to overlook for the first 5 books — was certainly a part of it. But that isn't the whole thing. It isn't even the main thing.

The main thing is; ever since I disentangled the underlying concept of Snape *working* with Lily from the generally received Snape-loved-Lily theory 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 partnership would pay off dividends in an area that is a LOT more important to the central issue of the story than just who originally owned that Potions book.

I was very well aware that I might be off admiring the Martian canals again. But I couldn't really shake the idea. And for that matter a lot of the reasoning deployed was fairly unapologetically tailored to fit with some of my own exercises in "extreme theorizing"

And, no, trying to make the potions book Lily's book in itself isn't a major plot point in itself, but it greased the wheels toward establishing that partnership. A partnership that involved collaborative efforts between the two of them. And that there had once *been* such a partnership might be something that Harry really needed to learn.

It also sorted out the stupid inscription in the book, and rendered it into a somewhat affectionate joke. Maybe the inscription; "This book is the Property of the Half-Blood Prince" really

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was on the same lines as "To Severus, from your partner Lily." She might have snatched the book up, inscribed it, and turned over to him the tangible record of their partnership to remember her by the day that he came to visit her at her Muggle home during the summer before Year 7 and explained why he had to publicly distance himself from her. (ETA: The Martian canals were particularly lovely that season.)

It clears up the fact that nobody recognized Snape's handwriting when he has been marking their essays for the past six years (which makes all three of the kids look like unobservant fools, and is a classic "idiot plot" device). Tiny cramped handwriting is not that uncommon. And it doesn't necessarily stay that way (mine certainly didn't), but Lily's didn't get time to change much. Made me wonder very much whether Petunia had anything lying around with Lily's handwriting on it.

But I was not going to insist on it. By that time I'd swung around to the view that the book really was Snape's. Although having it turn out to be Lily's would have been all too much in keeping with the trend that everything we "learned" in HBP was either incomplete or something other than what it seemed. i.e., that Tom was born bad, that Dumbledore was duped, and that Snape is evil.

Worked for me.



But it didn't have to come to that. I thought it was Snape's book regardless of the silly "Half-Blood Prince" inscription. If the book had been his mother's and she handed it down to him he could have put that inscription there before he was 10 and



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he didn't realize how lame it sounded. And then concealed it magically once he did. We never saw it until Hermione used that Revilatio! spell on the book, after all. Or it could have been a piece of premature irony on his part.

But, back on the canal boat, if Lily was his confidant, when he explained why he had to withdraw, one of them may have given the other the book with their mutual notes in it. As a keepsake.

Or, Lily may have had a bigger role in this drama than we had realized.

This one requires that we *all* pay a visit to the Martian canals.

What if she was Snape's intermediary for contacting Dumbledore?

We don't know just when Albus developed his Patronus messenger trick. And in any case, I doubted that they can be used to carry a particularly long or detailed message. And it would probably not have always been safe for Snape to receive one.

Or, for that matter, to send one.

And Snape could hardly take the risk of openly maintaining a correspondence with the Headmaster. A correspondence with a Muggle-born classmate wouldn't have looked particularly good either, but it wouldn't have gotten him summarily killed.

Particularly if it was maybe a *professional* correspondence.

She was certainly qualified for an entry-level job in the potions field. As was he.

And if Lily really was as good at potions as Slughorn says she was, she might have found work in some position that Snape could justify trying to re-establish contact with his old lab partner and to curry favor with her.

Which may have even gone some way towards why

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Voldemort was allegedly willing to spare her. IF he was really willing to spare her. At least in order to make *use* of her.

And probably no one would bother to notice that *she* might have been in contact with Dumbledore. Or possibly McGonagall.

And if that is the case, how do we know that some of the spell notes in that book might not be ciphers? Or decoding charms?

Ones that Harry might need.

Ah well. If they were, I was sure we'd find out eventually.



Or so I thought until I read DHs.

Instead we find that Rowling hasn't enough respect for her audience to bother to give them a coherent explanation for the shoddy work she expects them to just accept.

On any number of points, and the Potions book is only one of them.

What we now have discovered is that Rowling slung the whole Potions book device together to facilitate a surface plot of HBP (and to conceal the fact that she didn't actually *have* a legitimate story for that year) without even caring whether the details added up to a cohesive whole.

It was a 6th year Potions book because it *had* to be a 6th year book. It had to be a 6th year book because *Harry* was in 6th year that year, and if it hadn't been a 6th year book, being Harry, he wouldn't have bothered to look at it.

For that matter, the rot had already set in with OotP. Levicorpus escaped in 5th year because the Snape's Worst Memory sequence had already been established as taking place at the end of 5th year. She had already shown James using Levicorpus



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at the *end* of 5th year (since they had all just been sitting the DADA OWL) and later confirmed that the spell had been used in his 5th year by Remus's statement on the matter.

And she had probably only stuck that incident into the Marauders' 5th year because the year that Harry barged into the Pensieve and witnessed it was the year that *Harry* was in 5th year. The whole universe, after all, revolves around Harry Potter.

If it weren't for Levicorpus in 5th year, we would have had no problem with accepting the whole issue as being just as slight and disposable she finally revealed it to us.

I mean really! We'd already seen that at NEWT-Level there is only one 6th year DADA class, and students from all four Houses are in it. Would it have been so *very* hard to show the whole 6th year DADA class sitting a standard end-of-year test and then leaving at the end of the period? Nothing in the incident *requires* that it take place during the OWLs. Nothing in that sequence *requires* that it take place just before summer break. It's certainly not like Rowling has ever paid any real attention to what time anything *else* in the kids' classes actually takes place in relation to a calendar through the rest of the series.

And then establish just when it took place by having Remus say the spell was popular in their 6th year.

It didn't bloody need to happen in OWLs week.

She also didn't need to have Harry wondering whether the full moon was approaching, since she has now assassinated all the Marauders' characters by setting the hazing incident *after* the werewolf caper. And indeed, given that she showed Lily nagging Snape about the werewolf caper immediately after it happened, and they were clearly still at least titularly "friends,"



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the werewolf caper has to have taken place anything up to a year before the Pensieve junket. So why does whether the full moon was approaching on the day of the OWLs even matter?

Was this a delayed retaliation against Snape for not having rolled over and let himself be murdered? Excuse me, but by piling this incident on top of the werewolf caper those little bastards *deserved* expulsion. And they have now just given the school a nice public excuse to do it too. Or at least suspension until the end of term, even if that only came down to sending them all home a week or two early.

Admittedly, by this time I am in agreement that the werewolf caper was not a murder attempt, and that they had managed to pull off what they were *actually attempting*, probably just fed into their belief that they were invincible.

Rowling didn't need to even give us the "big reveal" that it had once been Snape's book — although I certainly have no objection to knowing that. I suppose she felt she owed us all at least *one* conclusive answer as reward for reading that book. She certainly didn't *use* that information for anything. It didn't serve any real narrative *purpose*. Did it even matter — since Harry didn't even keep the book? Because I thought he might have retrieved it from the Room of Hidden Things once Snape had left. Perhaps to find out something about his "enemy" if nothing else. But no. He just walked off and left it there.

One really hopes that Snape saw a glimpse of what Harry had done with his book, and retrieved it from the Room when he returned as Headmaster. Or at least one wishes he had. To lose it to Crabbe's fiendfyre is just a sheer bloody *waste*.





## Regarding the Potterverse Part III

# The 7th Son Collection

Theories which all were shot down/abandoned before the series was complete.

Feel free to point and laugh.



## The 7th Son

The following miscellany, is a collection of bits and pieces that is intended as something of a memorial to fanon theories past, I'll lead off with this one in particular, it's not one of my own — although I have some of my own to share here as well.

If we're going to be honest, by the time canon closed probably two-thirds of this whole essay collection belonged in here. For the most part, rather a lot of the essays in this whole collection are things which turned out to be thoroughly canon-shafted by the release of 'HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS' — at least in some fundamental particular.

However, the ones in *this* particular sub-collection are all theories which I had abandoned, or had been forced to abandon well before the final book was released. Although I will admit that a couple of them survived until HBP came out.



### ...And Other Failed Theories

**T**he first of these theories was at one time widely popular among younger fans during the 3-year summer. It was completely exploded by OotP and Rowling's World Book Day interview in March 2004. I refer to the "Seventh Son" theory, much beloved by certain friends of Ron Weasley.

Ladies, and gentlemen, a moment of silence if you will, JK Rowling clearly never intended to go there.

The theory hinges upon the premise that Arthur and Molly Weasley had lost a child at some point before we met them, and that Ron is not their sixth son, but their seventh. And that, in fact, Arthur himself was a 7th son, making Ron the 7th son





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of a 7th son. And, consequently; a “true seer.” The long debate over the probable ages of the two eldest Weasley sons, postulating anything up to a 14 year gap between Charlie and Percy contributed mightily to this theory.

Related to the pursuit of this hypothesis — which I have to admit that I never seriously entertained, I thought we had been handed the suggestion of a different rather distressing possible backstory regarding the Weasley family. This one seemed at first just a little more likely. And in fact was never altogether contradicted. (Probably due to its complete irrelevance.)

Early in the first book, Draco Malfoy makes a slur about always being able to recognize the Weasleys by their shabbiness, their red hair and their overly-large families. Draco Malfoy is only eleven at that point and there is no indication that he had ever met any of the Weasleys before. He got that statement from somewhere, and it is no stretch at all to assume that he is simply parroting his father. This constitutes an indication, a full year before the fistfight in CoS, of at least some kind of shared history between Arthur and Lucius.

Yet Harry has spent a part of almost every summer since then with the Weasleys and has never met any other Weasley apart from Molly and Arthur themselves, and their own seven children. What’s more, up to the end of HBP there was scant mention of any aunts or uncles, and even those few mentions of relatives that we did get from Ron are startlingly few and far between. This seems odd in retrospect. Particularly since Ron talks about his immediate family endlessly. Distinctly odd. Even more so if the Weasleys really are that numerous.

And it gradually sinks in that nearly all of Ron’s comments

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regarding members of the older generation seem to be about people who are dead. One begins to wonder whether Arthur might be much the same kind of “sole survivor” that Harry is.

Either that or the rest of the Weasley clan have all immigrated to Australia.

I ended up beginning to think that the Weasley clan may be one of the ones which took heavy casualties during Voldemort’s first rise, and that it was his own childhood’s large family that Arthur was trying to recreate. I suspected that he and Molly quite deliberately chose to start their family as soon as the knot was tied. And that their current family size is in some ways in the nature of a memorial.

Unless he and Molly simply kept trying for a girl.



I also originally thought that one of the reasons that Arthur’s family might have been targeted so heavily is that they are known to be connected to Albus Dumbledore. And not just in a philosophical or political context. I suspected that there might be a family connection in there somewhere as well.

Given the fact that both Arthur and Albus seem to be staunch upholders of the concept of meritocracy, neither of them would be likely to trade upon any such connection, if any such existed. And the kids may not even know about it. I postulated that the connection was at least four generations back from Arthur.

But you notice that, now that their family is all but grown, Molly and Arthur were two of the very first people that Albus turned to when it is known that Voldemort was back. This despite the fact that we were told outright in OotP that they



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were not members of the Order during the previous conflict, and are otherwise untried. (In retrospect, this bit of deliberate recruitment to the Order is most likely to be due to the Weasley's connection, not to Albus Dumbledore, but to Harry Potter.)

In addition, the degree, even if not the type of eccentricity displayed by both Albus and Arthur, as well as physical descriptions of the younger Dumbledore when compared to that of various young Weasleys, was just too suggestive of a family connection for me to ignore. And if this was the case, from Voldemort's point of view, what would you expect to be his answer to any bloodline which has produced the likes of an Albus Dumbledore?

I would have said that either 1. Arthur's great-great grandfather was Aberforth Dumbledore (unlikely, and now completely eliminated as a viable hypothesis. We've met Aberforth Dumbledore, even if he didn't introduce himself, and, moreover, Rowling has since moved Albus's birthdate forward a good 40 years). Or, perhaps, 2. The Dumbledore brothers' mother was a Weasley — which we now know she wasn't. Or even, 3. There was a Dumbledore sister who married into the Weasley clan. In any event, I thought the connection, if any, was some generations back, and Arthur doesn't refer to the matter. After all, just about all pureblood wizards are related to each other anyway.

I was thumping this particular drum on various lists for a couple of years during the 3-year summer. But once I got a clearer idea of just how important Albus Dumbledore allegedly was to the British wizarding world, I realized that I would be very surprised if Rowling did decide to pull a relationship between Albus and Arthur out of her hat. That kind of promi-

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nence does tend to slop over onto known family members, and for all his popularity with his co-workers, Arthur does not fit the profile of being Albus Dumbledore's acknowledged great-grand nephew. (Aberforth, at the Hog's Head now seemed almost certainly not to be known to be the Headmaster's brother. Or not to the general run of the pub's clientele.)

And, moreover, I could no longer see that it would really matter, in the long run. Such a relationship is not necessary to the story, and it changes nothing regarding the certainty that, in the final accounting, everything's all going to come down to Harry vs. Voldemort. The scant possibility remained, but it had become irrelevant.

And with the release of DHs it was clear that Rowling had other plans for the Dumbledore family entirely.



Over a number of years, I've done a good deal of thinking regarding fan theories. The best ones tend to be fairly simple, really. Not obvious perhaps, but simple. They don't require that characters behave counter to their established personality or temperament, as observed or reported in the books. They don't necessarily require that if an action probably took place at some point, then it must have been performed by a character we have already met. And they certainly don't require that just because magic is capable of producing a result, that it necessarily *did* produce that result.

A "good" theory doesn't have to turn out to be right, either, although that is certainly a bonus. But a theory should be internally plausible, not just dramatic. And you shouldn't need to



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have to “move furniture” in order to fit it into canon.

And to be a *really* good theory, it needs to be based on something that is already there. I realize that any number of my own theories probably end up not qualifying as “good” theories by the end of the day. And mine are not the only ones, either.



For example: prior to the release of OotP some of the most widely circulated theories in fandom were MemoryCharmed!Neville, VoldemortSuspects!Snape, DarkLord!Grindelwald, and Snape-loved-Lily. All of these were fairly obvious theories. Any reader could draw these conclusions, even in the face of a total lack of evidence or canon support for any of them (which at that point was, in fact, the case). Some of them are also fairly simple. These days, the first two of these are just as obviously wrong.

I've gone into some detail exploding the VoldemortSuspects!Snape theory in the essay entitled 'Double-00 Sevie', and canon seems to bear me out. And I will also say flat out that I've never agreed with the theory of DarkLord!Grindelwald, and still do not believe it, even in the face of Rowling's endorsing of it. Her explanation, like so many of her explanations in that final book, does not hold up to any kind of even casual examination.

At one point, Snape-loved-Lily looked like it was probably going to go out without a whimper, too. By the time I got to the end of OotP I'd have been amazed if Rowling ever gave us one word on the subject of young Severus Snape's interactions with Miss Lily Evans between that point and the end of Book 7.

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And I certainly no longer believed the typical fanon iteration of it, that of Snape's actions having been based on an unrequited teenaged crush. That was just *too* obvious. That one had gone stale. And it was no longer necessary to the back-story. Fanon Snape might still require it. But the one in canon certainly didn't.

Well, it quickly appeared that I was at least partially wrong about that. Once Slughorn spent the whole following book tacitly throwing Snape and Lily into proximity it was clear that *something* related to that issue was going to be deployed. But I did turn out to be at least somewhat correct insofar as I was convinced that whatever the connection was, it would turn out to be something more significant than a case of unrequited teen lurve.

With MemoryCharmed!Neville we had a theory that from where I was standing never really did fly. The whole premise that Neville might “know something” regarding Lord Voldemort which he had overheard as a toddler and had erased from his memory after the attack on his parents, made no sense. Just because forgetfulness *can* be induced magically does not mean that every instance of it necessarily has to have been induced magically. And for Neville to have been over-enthusiastically Memory Charmed as a toddler served no useful purpose to anyone. The DEs who tortured his parents were all caught, almost immediately. There's never been any question of who they were. Memory charming Neville did not keep them from being identified. Voldemort had been attempting to return since Book 1, and had moved about considerably, so any knowledge of where he might have been hiding ten years earlier



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was irrelevant to the story as it was being told now. Frank and Alice Longbottom — or for that matter, the Lestranges and Barty Crouch Jr — were all unlikely to have had any unique information concerning Voldemort for Neville to have learned.

For the purposes of the plot, Memory Charming a 2-year-old Neville Longbottom was useless. Utterly useless. There was no real \*bang\* there. What the reader needed at that point was a reason to know just why Neville was significant to the story. Because it was obvious to all of us that he was significant. We just couldn't see exactly how. Well, by this time we've been given much better reasons to think so than that old lame-arsed effort.



I'd say that if there was anyone in the series who was acting as if he had been dragged offstage and Memory Charmed without our knowledge, it was not Neville. It was Montague. And, post-HBP, even he seems to have merely been keeping the information regarding his experiences to himself, at least until the end of the year when he shared it with the rest of the Slytherins.

Leaving us with Gilderoy Lockhart, Ginny, Bertha Jorkins, the Robinson family, and Marietta Edgecombe, most of whom got their memories tampered with on stage in full view of the reader. And in the past, we can add Morfin Gaunt and, probably, Hokey.

The late, still rather lamented, "seventh son" theory was based upon a reading that Ron is in fact the seventh son of a seventh son and really is (unbeknownst to even himself) a true

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Seer. And such a reading has been proved to be faulty. As to Ron's being a seer; in books 2–4 there were only the mildest of hints that this could be the case, and one would have expected that if Ron really did have the "gift" it would have displayed itself a bit more clearly to the reader by the end of GoF.

And in any case; the real issue isn't that Ron is a seer. It is that Ron is capable of making leaps of intuition. As Hermione, frankly, is not.

And then Rowling pretty well shot the whole possibility out of the water in her March 2004 World Book Day interview in which she stated quite clearly that Arthur had been one of only three brothers. With no sisters. Ginny is the first female Weasley to be born in generations.

She followed up on this in the joint interview of 2005, I believe, in which she came out and said that Ginny's magic is strong since *she* is a 7th child. Try; "Ron is the 6th son of a 3rd son." Nope. No "bang" there.

If Rowling had ever had any intention of going there, we ought to have got a clearer indication of it in the course of the series well before Book 5. And we didn't.



On the other hand, until all of the Weasley relatives crawled out of the woodwork for Bill's wedding, my original suspicion that we may indeed have a "sole survivor" in the Weasley household looked like actually panning out. Possibly even a pair of them.

It seemed as though one of Arthur's two brothers was clearly "Uncle-Billius-who-saw-the-Grim", and died of it. And we have



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no information whether his other brother was still alive or not. (ETA: like Sirius Black, Ron appears to have fallen into the habit of referring to all uncles, great-uncles, and great-grand-uncles and aunts merely as uncles and aunts. Billius was a great-uncle.)

And Molly's maiden name was Prewett, just like the two brothers; Gideon and Fabian who "fought like heroes" to the point that it took more than five DEs to kill them. Arthur's statement regarding the horror of coming home to find the Dark mark floating over your house is almost certainly related to this event.

I thought that in that last piece of information we may have been given a clue as to why Molly, who so clearly wanted that large family, and who had so carefully spaced her children about 2-3 years apart should have suddenly decided to try for a 7th child a scant few months after she had delivered her 6th.

Gideon and Fabian Prewett were members of the Order of the Phoenix when they were killed; and at that point I firmly believed the Order of the Phoenix was probably only founded after Trelawney made her Prophecy at some time between Halloween of 1979 and early 1980.

Ron was born on the first of March, 1980. And Ron's name already commemorates Uncle Billius who saw the Grim. I suspect that Gideon and Fabian Prewett were killed fairly soon after that, and if Ginny had been another son, as her parents, who with their track record, had every reason to expect, her name would almost certainly have been either Gideon or Fabian. At a guess, Gideon seems the top contender.

Not that this actually matters to anything that's actually in the story, of course.

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Which brings me to some of my own "Theories that Didn't Make It".

All of the essays in this sub-collection are included primarily for entertainment value, since they are clearly nowhere that Rowling ever intended to go. But I was rather pleased with some of them at the time, and was sorry to see them closed down. The examples in this particular piece are a bit less developed than the ones that I've since spun off into essays of their own. And, in fact I'd already abandoned all of these here even before Rowling bothered to shoot them out of the air.

The first is a digression and is pretty feeble. It has to do with the apparent overriding need that the whole story arc seemed to have for Harry to hate Professor Snape. From every angle you look it seems to be grossly in excess of the requirements of dramatic storytelling. The theory itself was never actually exploded, but by HBP or thereabouts I'd already gone off it.

It is even more completely counter-indicated by some of the later explorations in the 'Out on a Limb' collection of even more blatantly unsupported theories.

Herein I present:

### Snape's Life Debt

Sirius Black is understood to have set Severus Snape up when they were schoolboys. Set him up in a situation which could all-too-easily have gotten him killed. Or at the very least afflicted with a horrible and incurable curse. As a result, Severus Snape ended up alive, and intact and quite possibly owing a wizard's debt to James Potter. The same kind of life debt that Pettigrew



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allegedly owes Harry. (ETA: assuming that Albus wasn't simply lying about the whole thing. In both instances.)

A debt which Snape seems to have failed to repay. In fact, circumstances intervened wherein rather than repaying his debt, Severus Snape ended up compounding it by betraying James Potter to his death. Yes, I do believe that Severus Snape may have felt deep, and utterly sincere remorse when he ultimately discovered that the hypothetical family that his report of the partial Prophecy to Lord Voldemort endangered turned out to be James Potter and his wife. And not necessarily only for Lily's sake, or for the sake of an innocent child.

Because, Muggle father or no, Severus Snape was wizarding-raised, and he knows that such a debt bears consequences..

Heavy consequences.

Particularly if you default on it.

And he did. He did it unintentionally, but he did.

Severus Snape however grudgingly felt himself to be in James Potter's debt.

I think that by the laws of magical balance that govern such matters, James's son may have had the right to collect it.

Personally.

If he chooses.

And, given the situation that James Potter's son has been thrust into (and that was thanks to Severus's actions as well) to give the child the weapon that he needs in order to kill him most effectively, should circumstances demand it, may, in Severus's, and possibly Albus's, reckoning, count as a just repayment of this still outstanding debt.

And, if this was the answer, I thought that the matter may

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not have been unrelated to the argument that Hagrid overheard. Or to Albus's decision to bring matters to a head by embarking on the adventure of the sea cave. I suspected it was not only Harry who needed that lesson in following orders. Nor was it only Harry who needed to be shown the way. But I knew that I could be misinterpreting the pattern, and, indeed, I rather suspected that I was.

But if I wasn't, in the end, the final decision was going to be up to Harry. ("Only Potter has the right to decide.")



This next is one that didn't get shot down until DHs. It was fun, and I'm not sure that some part of it might not have been a part of an original intention, but probably not all of it. The set-up was there, though. And just a bit too well-constructed not to have ever meant something, even though Rowling abandoned it.

Herein I present:

### The Redheaded Pimpernel

This one wasn't altogether my own. I definitely wasn't the only fan to have explored this particular possibility. I was certainly one of the early adopters, however. The possibility actually looked pretty good.

In fact it still isn't completely discredited. How did Percy know to contact Aberforth Dumbledore the night the balloon went up, eh? Or for Aberforth to contact him? How did Percy even know who Aberforth Dumbledore was? Percy was never a member of the DA. Nor the Order of the Phoenix. Or was he?

For a long time it seemed possible that after the Crouch



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debacle, Percy Weasley could have been contacted by Dumbledore, or another member of the Order of the Phoenix currently employed at the Ministry (of which there are several), who asked him if he was willing to make use of the situation. It wasn't just Voldemort who can engineer a promotion for a useful youngster. At the end of GoF Percy was in the perfect position to go undercover. One loud, semi-public, acrimonious falling-out with his father and moving out of the family home would do it. And those were the exact steps which he had taken by the opening of OotP.

ETA: We are given to understand that it was supposedly no such thing. But, even now it still looks as if there could have been possibilities in that direction.

By that point in the series Dumbledore knew that he needed all the inside information on the Ministry that he could get. And not all of his spies are spying on Voldemort. Even if the DEs in the Ministry looked at Percy's blood-traitor upbringing and Muggle-born [former?] girlfriend, and decided that he isn't good recruitment material, he was still now in a position to hear things inside the Ministry that no one would ever tell his father. Particularly if he is widely understood to have rejected his father and all his father's associations.

But if Percy Weasley had gone undercover, no one but Dumbledore, Percy, and/or Percy's contact knew it. And we wouldn't be told about it until the adventure was over. Harry's raid on the Department of Mysteries didn't flush all of Voldemort's supporters in the Ministry out from cover. Or, indeed, anyone other than Walden MacNair. So far as we know, none of the other DEs captured that night were Ministry employees.



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The Ministry was still harboring any number of Voldemort's moles. Dumbledore still needed agents there.

And even at that, after HBP I'd have been inclined to downgrade Percy from the status of spy to that of informer.

The one thing that I did not expect in book 6 was a big sentimental reunion between Percy and his parents. Percy was clearly at the Burrow for Christmas dinner under protest, and was really willing to make amends only to his mother. And his mother was the only member of the family prepared to accept the gesture. Whether or not Percy was working undercover — which was still far from a done-deal — he was unlikely to return to his family at that point. I thought perhaps he *would* change his name to Weatherby.

And, although his having gone underground wasn't the most likely hypothesis, so far we had seen nothing in Percy's behavior which would not be consistent with deliberately distancing himself from his family, for their own as well as his mission's protection. Even his over-the-top letter to Ron, congratulating him on his Prefect's appointment, and going on to advise him to distance himself from Harry Potter in the future could be read as a gloriously effective preemptive strike against the chance that those kids would ever voluntarily stick their little noses into anything in which Percy is known to be engaged. Conversely, Percy managed to pass along quite a lot of information in that letter. In a form that would not have raised suspicion against himself had it fallen into the wrong hands.

Although I'll willingly admit that if we had ever been shown the slightest indication that Percy possesses anything recognizable as a sense of humor I'd have felt a lot more confident about it.





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Percy certainly doesn't share the twins' variety of humor. But there are other sorts. One could readily imagine a witty!Percy snickering up his sleeve as he composed that letter, milking every phrase for the ultimate payload in insulting pomposity. The fact that we had not been given any indication of a witty!Percy, is the main thing that kept me from buying it. Because I never did *quite* buy it. However much I liked the idea.

Along those lines, Percy's obvious glee during the showdown in Dumbledore's office after Marietta Edgecombe ratted out Dumbledore's Army can as easily be read as a perfectly consistent Gryffindor reaction to what had to be the most exciting situation he had managed to find himself in since he undertook his mission!

Of course this all feeds directly into the rest of the "Red-headed Pimpernel" theories that used to periodically crop up on some of my lists. Yes, indeed, Weatherby; bore everyone to tears over the regulation thicknesses of cauldron bottoms and other such pettifogging details, and no one will guess that you are a dashing secret agent — until the war is over.

And, as a certain Ms Borrible on Lj pointed out, there is likely to be a lot more behind that showdown in Dumbledore's office than meets the eye. For one thing, Dumbledore is clearly not a bit surprised by anything that takes place during it. And while Dobby might have been the one to tip Albus off about Umbridge being on the warpath, Dobby was — at the same time — supposedly off warning the DA as soon as he learned of the fact and was most unlikely to also be the one to warn Dumbledore about the impending arrival of Cornelius Fudge and his entourage. Indeed, it is not impossible that it was Dumbledore who

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may have informed Dobby of the impending train wreck, and told him to alert the kids of their danger.

And who — in Fudge's office — is most likely to have been in a position to have tipped Albus off about it? Or to have made sure that at least one of the Aurors present would be one of Dumbledore's own people? It is a bit much to be expected to believe that *all* of that managed to happen *completely* by accident, you know.



The next bits here have been moved over from the 'Raiders of the Lost Horcrux' essay. They hadn't exactly been exploded when I excised them, but I really didn't think that Rowling was ever going to go here, and in the face of later possibilities, I didn't place much credibility in them myself. There are just too many logic holes and variables about the set-up of that cave for anyone to get it right. Although there are some side issues here that I still think might have passed muster:

### **The Adventure of Regulus Black and the Dark Lord's Sea Cave**

#### **Hypothesis, with alternates:**

Okay; the starting point is that Regulus Black already knows Voldemort's secret. I wasn't convinced that we would ever be given a satisfactory explanation for that, but let that pass. He knew the secret. That much is stated too unequivocally in canon for any other interpretation.

Or at least, he knew the secret insofar as he knew that Voldemort had made *one* Horcrux. He probably never realized there were more of them.



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If Regulus already had the authority to get into the cave, he could have discovered the Horcrux at any point. There doesn't seem to be any kind of monitoring to let Voldemort know when someone manages to get into the cave. We didn't know whether Reggie made more than one visit before he managed to get the Horcrux out of the basin, either. If Harry and Dumbledore hadn't touched the water, the Inferi might have ignored the boat passing overhead on their return trip as well.

For that matter, seeing that faint green glow when he was sent there to fetch a bunch of Inferi on Voldemort's orders might have made Reggie curious enough to have made a point of bringing a broom along on a later, unauthorized trip, and flown to the island. (For that matter, wouldn't flying into the antechamber at low tide be more comfortable than swimming?)

We now take another leap of illogic and assume that — despite the fact that due to the potion's apparent opacity, there is no outward sign that anything is hidden in the basin — he realized that whatever was concealed in that basin was likely to be extremely valuable to their Leader, and he was determined to discover what it was. After all; quite a number of Riddle's followers are the kind of people who are likely to be very interested in finding out something that might give them some degree of power over the Dark Lord. Or in discovering his secrets.

Reggie could have gotten to the island, seen the kind of situation he was dealing with, left, and come back another day with a bezoar, perhaps a bottle of clean water and some kind of general antidote. (Would *you* want to drink water from a lake that's full of animated corpses? Well? Would you? That's disgusting.)



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For that matter, if he can command the Inferi, he could have ordered one of *them* to drink the potion. It's dead. The potion won't do it any harm. And, after all, dead men tell no tales.

(Q: Why didn't Volemort do that instead of demanding the loan of a House Elf?)

Or, in a totally unpredictable idiot savant move, he could have recalled various childhood Halloween parties and "bobbed" for the Horcrux. And not swallowed any of the potion at all. Dumbledore and Harry couldn't touch the potion with their hands, but I bet that basin would have let you put your face in it. That's the kind of solution which is just stupid enough to have worked!

Or, if the resemblance to such fountains in folklore is misleading, and the basin is not self-renewing, he could have drunk it, one gobletfull at a time, over a dozen visits, treating himself with various antidotes between each foray. (Do we know whether a bezoar is good for only one use?) He may even have managed to get a sample of the potion out of the cave before the end of this process to try to produce an antidote. That's standard 6th year NEWTs work, after all.

Or he could have taken the sample to his "fellow traveler" Snape, asking whether he was familiar with it, or if he can analyze it, devise an antidote, or even reproduce it.

Even if — perhaps especially if — Snape had never encountered anything like this potion before (and this is very likely if Riddle actually put the Horcrux in the sea cave before his first absence from the ww back in the 1940s. That was before Snape was born) this is a project that would have caught his interest. It also might make Snape suspicious of what Reggie Black could





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be up to.

But, since it was not connected with any plan of Voldemort's that he knew about, he kept the information to himself. Or, if he was already Dumbledore's man, he shares it only with Albus.

He also analyses the Potion and reproduces it. And he may have devised an antidote. He may even have had a batch of the antidote ready for Albus's use when he returned from the cave with Harry that night. We may find it in his quarters. With instructions for its use after his departure. (Unlikely, I agree.)



But frankly I don't care too much for that theory. Too complex, too many gaps, and too many "what ifs." But let's follow the problem a little further, anyway.

Back to the chronology:



Regulus Black finds out about the Horcrux. He leaves it where he found it.

Voldemort rains on Black's parade, and Black is on the war-path.

He doesn't, however, pitch a fit about it in Voldemort's presence, or that of anyone who can carry tales. In fact he doesn't pitch a fit out where anyone can observe it at all. He realizes that he's trapped himself, and there is no way out of this but death. He's furious. But he'd rather die than go on supporting this Master.

Instead he secretly plans a raid on the cave.

Hypothesis: assuming that he has not had any dealings with

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Snape to that point; he plans his raid and realizes that he's going to have to do it the hard way. And he knows he is probably not going to live to crow about it. (Which pisses him off all over again.) But he is going to do his damndest to try.

On his final trip into the cave, he either bobs for the Horcrux, or he swallows the bezoar first, then alternates potion and water, or potion and antidote, whatever, gets the locket out of the basin, replaces it with the decoy, and feeling very weak, summons Kreachur, passes the locket to him tells him to put it somewhere safe and come back to help him. He manages to get out of the cave with Kreachur's help, and then he goes straight to the best potions expert he knows.

Snape manages to neutralize the potion and weasels at least some of the story out of him. We don't know what part or how much. Not enough, but probably more than Black, who is not in top form, realizes at the time.

But Black soon does realize that he's given at least some of the game away. Well, that's it for Reggie. He's been indiscreet, he doesn't trust Snape to keep what he's found out to himself (regardless of whether Snape is Dumbledore's agent at this time yet or not, Reggie doesn't know it). He's not going to get out of this alive, anyway, so he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

So he pitches his fit, not mentioning the Horcrux, but the fact that Riddle is a halfblood, in one last, fine, grand gesture, not to the Dark Lord himself, but to Bellatrix, who got him into this mess in the first place, (keeping it in the family, as it were) and then takes off. Bellatrix reports him to Voldemort immediately and the order for his death goes out.

...?



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Uh... No. I really don't think so.



Alternate Hypothesis: if the Black-Snape potions project above is not beyond credibility. He goes to Snape. Asks him for a batch of the green potion. No, not the *antidote*, the *potion*. Snape is really suspicious now. They either have it out between them then, or Snape makes the potion and follows Black when he takes it, and they have it out in the sea cave.

Snape was on the ascent in the DE hierarchy by some point in 1980\* after having reported the partial Prophecy to the Dark Lord. But he was just one of the grunts before that, and associated with Malfoy rather than the Blacks.

[\*This version was developed before the release of the Black family Tapestry sketch.]

But we do not know who in the family Reggie was closest to. He was certainly closer in age to Narcissa, who was married to Malfoy. Difficult as it is to believe that any sort of common sense could ever be had from a member of the Black family; regardless of whatever scenario you may decide to create or adopt, Reggie just might have leveled with Snape on just how wrong he had discovered Lord Voldemort's intentions (or pretensions) to be, in hopes that Snape might spare his life and let him get away.

For all that he truly loves the Dark Arts, and for all that may have been a thoroughly nasty young piece of work, I really don't think that Severus Snape necessarily enjoys killing people.

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I also think that he's a White Hat. And I'm willing to believe that he may have been so at least since some — as yet undetermined — time before the Prophecy was made. We don't know but that the affair of Regulus Black might have been the incident that finally convinced Snape to turn his coat.

At any rate, Reggie has already replaced the Horcrux with the false one and between he and Snape they restore the "drink me ONLY" spells as well as Black can remember them.

I'm not sure I buy this one either. The set-up is just too elaborate.



However, if Regulus managed to survive and escape, it *might* explain why we got that silly performance in HBP, Chapter 3.

Albus needed to find out whether Sirius's Will trumped the fact that Reggie was still alive.

Sirius Black's death threw Albus and Snape a major curve. Black was still a young man, relatively healthy, supposedly safe in a hiding place that no enemies can penetrate. Nobody expected him to DIE.

I've been grouching ever since HBP came out over how JKR could overlook such a fundamental point of British common law — which long predates a separate wizarding world — that clearly states that you cannot legally benefit from committing a murder. This is one of the fundamental principles of all murder mysteries, to which the Harry Potter series bears way too close a resemblance in form for JKR to be unaware of. Three quarters of mystery fiction is engaged in finding out who secretly benefits from the murder (or in what way they benefit) in order



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to figure out who did it.

There were any number of witnesses — on both sides — who watched Bellatrix knock her cousin through the Veil. She killed him. Publicly. She cannot inherit from him! Not if the wizarding world makes the slightest pretense of functioning as a just society. You cannot have a just society if your citizens are periodically murdered and society just hands their assets over to the murderer without protest. That is just plain immoral! The way that we've become acquainted with obviously hasn't got a clue about ethics, but it does at least appear to have morals.

Consequently Dumbledore needed to know whether whatever bindings tie a House Elf to his Master had followed the Will, or bypassed it and shifted to Reggie anyway.

If it had gone to Reggie they had a problem on their hands. Kreacher is a loose canon. And he approved of Reggie. An Elf may not know who his Master is, but he would certainly know who his master isn't. And if his isn't Harry, and isn't Bellatrix, and isn't Andromeda (or Draco, in the off-chance that it was tied to male heirs to the degree that being male was more important than being a Black) then somebody might start asking some very inconvenient questions.

So. They have been pitched into a situation which could potentially endanger Snape, who Dumbledore had appeared to be determined to protect, at all costs, throughout the entire series up to that point.

Since, within this reading, Snape almost certainly claimed credit for killing Reggie, they had a heavy investment in making sure that everyone continues to believe that Reggie is dead.

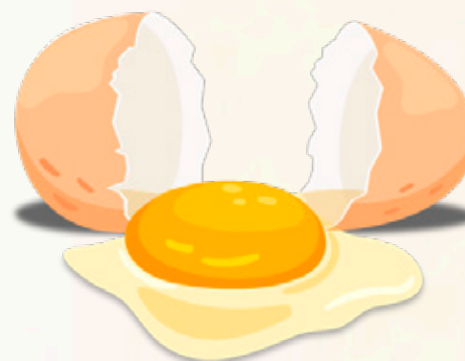
Albus's statement: "And if such an enchantment exists, then

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the ownership of the house is most likely to pass to the eldest of Sirius's living relatives, which would mean his cousin, Bellatrix Lestranger." was not a complete lie, you can tell that it was a partial truth. Dumbledore shaved it by stating that it would pass to the *eldest* of Sirius's living relatives and threw Bellatrix in as a red herring. He was very concerned over whether it had devolved upon Sirius's eldest *male* relative.

And, of course, throwing Bellatrix's name into the pot was a powerful inducement to Harry — who was saying he didn't *want* the house. Harry would hardly continue to refuse to take possession of the house if there was any chance that to do so would mean that it might go to *her*.

Or it all may be just a very silly scene which makes no real kind of sense, that Rowling threw in because she thought it was *funny*.





## The Grindelwald Conspiracy

The first iteration of The Grindelwald Conspiracy was an essay entitled; 'Tom Riddle and the Knights of Walpurgis' which was part of the original essay collection when it was uploaded in the spring of 2003. It hung around on the site, in one form or other, for about 3 years before it was summarily canon-shafted by the "official Riddle backstory" in HBP.

Consequently, over the relevant three years, it ended up getting rather a lot of development. There honestly hadn't been anything in canon prior to HBP to actually contradict it. Which, considering how thoroughly it got exploded by HBP is a bit surprising.

That was a bit of consolation, too. There really *wasn't* any way I could have known better before that point.

As I have stated elsewhere, I never really bought the package of "the Dark Lord Grindelwald." Y'know, that continental political threat who worked either in concert with the Muggle Adolf Hitler (or his Potterverse counterpart, if any) or who was using the mid-20th century Muggle war as a cloak under which to advance his own agenda. I go into my reasons to sniff at this particular, widely-accepted fanon theory in other essays in this collection so I will not be repeating it here.



In a much earlier iteration of the site I once mentioned that someday when Rowling had finished off the series, I might take the essay collection and build a .pdf project from it. One in which I would include a section on theories which did not make it. It only occurred to me as I was coming into the home stretch on one Autumn's semi-annual



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update of the essay collection (now over a decade ago itself), that I had a perfectly good place to collect such material in the essay entitled 'The 7th Son'.

For the following couple of years various up-ended theories found a new home in that article which became sort of an omnibus of dead ends and missed connections. All of these theories were included primarily for entertainment value, since they turned out to be no place that Rowling had *ever* intended to go. But I had once been rather pleased with them, and had been sorry to see some of them shot down. That essay eventually outgrew its page and has since been split up into several others, and now constitutes its own sub-collection.

But the '7th Son' collection originally had nothing to do with this theory.

The theory related to the Grindelwald Conspiracy was arguably the oldest in the whole collection. It was also one of the ones to take the longest time to *be* shot down. And, in the event, it did not even *stay* shot down — having abruptly lurched back into relevance under another guise in the summer of 2008, a full year after the series was complete.



But, prior to the release of HBP, it was easy enough to postulate an alternate scenario wherein Grindelwald — and his associates — really were a threat. Just not the variety of threat that fanon was determined to paint them. Instead, I postulated that he and his cohorts were a very *familiar* threat. Positively pedestrian, in fact. And that defeating him was an accomplishment for which, ironically, Albus Dumbledore must share much





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of the credit with a certain young Tom Marvolo Riddle.

Shall we all take another look at just what — until the release of HBP — we thought we knew for certain to have taken place, in connection with the wizarding world, in the year 1945?

(And by the time HBP was released, I was inclined to just forget about WWII. I was pretty sure that date didn't relate to WWII at all. I was convinced that it related to young Tom Riddle.)

The main events that most of us were convinced took place in 1945, more or less in this order, were:

- 1 Tom Riddle finished his 7th year at Hogwarts at the end of June. He was legally "of age" and no longer being monitored under the reasonable restrictions of underage magic.
- 2 Tom Riddle murdered his father and paternal grandparents in the village of Little Hangleton, during the summer of that year by means of the killing curse. We were sure of this because the means used was recognizably described in our summary of the mundane newspapers, although the existence of a killing curse was not information available the mundane investigators describing its effects.
- 3 Tom Riddle then, apparently, dropped off of the face of the earth. (I did not think that one could do this, even if one is a wizard, without at least some help.)
- 4 Albus Dumbledore defeated the Dark wizard Grindelwald.

I found it extremely difficult to believe that the first three of these events could be so closely interconnected without the fourth being so as well.

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For that matter, I also couldn't really believe that you can set off three AKs in a Muggle village and the Department of Magical Law Enforcement won't mount some level of investigation. Even if you, personally, are no longer under the (as of that time still not officially acknowledged in canon) Trace.

Well, in the wake of HBP, we can see that I was at least right about that last point. Although we've still no official explanation for how Tom managed to disable his Trace.

Nor did we know at that point that the murders had taken place, not in the summer of 1945, but in the summer of 1942, i.e., before the death of Moaning Myrtle at Hogwarts the following spring. Nor did we know that Tom Riddle evidently stuck around the wizarding world, in plain sight, after finishing school for some 2–3 years, and that when he actually disappeared he was not yet officially even a fugitive. I also did not know, any more than anyone else did, that well before 1945 Albus Dumbledore felt he had already been given ample reason to be paying close, specific attention to Riddle.

Until HBP was out however, we also did not know of the existence of Morfin Gaunt, nor that Tom Riddle had someone in the neighborhood available to take the rap for his father and grandparents' murders.



Setting aside the absence of any of this fairly key information, Let's wander down this particular road a bit further, following my original reasoning:



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Tom Riddle is still spoken of (even by Dumbledore) as “probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen.” We were given to understand that during Tom Riddle’s years at the school just about the whole staff were united in singing the boy’s praises. His OWL and NEWT scores must have been impressive. (Even though old Griselda Marchbanks reserves her praise for Albus himself.) The name “Tom Riddle” is bound to have been mentioned, probably more than once, around whatever Ministry Department headhunts each year’s crop of the most promising 7th year students. Plus, post-HBP we now even have Horace Slughorn stationed at the school pulling strings to advance his “favorites.”

Given all of this probability, can you seriously believe that the name of this massacred Muggle family; “Riddle,” isn’t going to ring a bell somewhere in the Ministry? Some of the younger employees at the Ministry would have been at school with Tom Riddle. Can we believe that Frank Bryce’s testimony of having seen a pale, dark-haired, teenaged boy hanging about the property on the night of the murders would not have been noted by the Ministry investigators? That no one is going to put 2+2 together and follow this maybe-trail back to Hogwarts? Where we have Riddle’s own admission to Headmaster Dippet that he had a witch mother and a Muggle father?

I honestly thought that the real significance of 1945 is that it was at that point in time that Albus Dumbledore finally realized just exactly what Tom Marvolo Riddle was: a very dangerous Dark wizard with a thirst for vengeance who was unlikely to remain in hiding forever.

(Well, with 20/20 hindsight, no. If the murders took place in

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the summer of ’42, and Tom Riddle didn’t even sit his OWLs until June of ’43, no one in the Ministry was likely to make any kind of connection. Particularly since they already had someone who confessed to having murdered a family of Muggles who were named Riddle.)

And now, let’s jump back another seven years from 1945. In fact, let’s go back even farther than a mere seven years. Let’s go back to around 1920–1925 before Tom Riddle was even born, and see if we can pick up this trail from the other end. The Grindelwald end.



The Dark Arts are not formally taught at Hogwarts (only Defense). But we don’t know how long this has been the case. It seemed quite possible that this is a comparatively recent policy that was only established when Dumbledore became Headmaster. In fact, if this was not the case in Headmaster Dippet’s day, Tom could have learned something of the Dark Arts quite openly. In fact, it is strongly implied in CoS that by his 5th year he was quite accomplished in the Dark Arts.

We still have no indication one way or the other in canon as to just when or if the formal study of the Dark Arts may have been eliminated from the curriculum. But so far as we know, the study of the Dark Arts has always been discouraged at Hogwarts.

So where did Riddle learn them?

If the Dark Arts had already disappeared from the Hogwarts curriculum by the 1940s doesn’t it stand to reason that Tom, as a Muggle-raised halfblood with no prior knowledge of, or con-



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nections to the wizarding world would have had to learn them from somebody?



At this point I also invoked part of the main premise of a fanfic; the LiveJournalist going by the name of Minerva McTabby's unfinished 'TWO WORLDS AND IN BETWEEN's backstory, wherein it is postulated that a "great Dark uprising" took place in the late 19th century, following a groundswell of resistance to the (recently established?) Ministry policy of aggressively seeking out, training and admitting Muggle-born wizards into the wizarding world. McTabby also postulated a second, lesser reprise of such an open conflict occurring in the early 1900s.

We started out with some canon support for at least the first part of this reading in the assertions within canon that Lord Voldemort was regarded to be the "most dangerous Dark wizard in 100 years," for all that Rowling seems to have dispensed with this particular piece of background and is determinedly pretending that she never said anything of the sort. We do not know who the nameless Dark wizard that caused such a stir one hundred years earlier was supposed to have been, but clearly Grindelwald, defeated some 50 years afterward, and whose activities never touched Great Britain, didn't rate.

The Grindelwald Conspiracy does not insist on this "two Dark wars" scenario, but it would fit easily into the impressions that we are given in canon of the kind of social situation which might have prevailed by 1920. By 1920, all such uprisings have been suppressed and the established policy of the Ministry of Magic is to seek out, educate and assimilate all magical children

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into the wizarding world regardless of their parentage.

There is a faction who do not believe that this is to the greater benefit of the wizarding world as a whole, although they have grown to realize that another open rebellion in opposition to this policy cannot succeed.

I postulated that around 1920 there was a small group of such wizards who were also dabblers (in a perfectly legitimate manner — so far as the Ministry knows) in the Dark Arts, who were willing to use such arts to get what they want. Given that various iterations of common forms of blood-status bigotry have been deliberately seeded throughout the whole HP series, it was no stretch to suppose that these gentlemen were a cadre of die-hard blood purity fanatics who have already lost the battle, but refuse to accept that the war is over.



I feel it ought also to be mentioned that at this point in my theorizing I was attempting to comply with Rowling's earlier stated intentions (in interviews) that she did \*not\* want a cardboard baddie dressed in black, but a villain whose motivations one could understand. (In Lucius Malfoy, back when he was standing in for the villain of the piece, she had one. Tom Riddle, on the other hand, is more 2-dimensional each time we encounter him.)

When I first started building theories with the intention of posting them, I also was not postulating Tom Riddle as having been an irredeemable sociopath from the get-go. But it rapidly became unavoidable to conclude that, yes, he was indeed a sociopath.





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Rowling stated in passing in an early 2003 interview before the release of OotP that the Death Eaters had developed from a similar, pre-existing organization that Voldemort had taken control of. This group had once been known as the Knights of Walpurgis. I drew a straight line between two points and suggested that my group of pureblood supremacists was composed of members of that organization. It may have been only a small number of the members of that organization, however.

I gave a deal of thought to my suspicions regarding what kind of faction might have recruited Tom Riddle as a poster child of the “Ancient Lineage” hard-liners, despite the fact that the boy was quite literally a halfblood. And I attempted to determine just what such a faction’s agenda is likely to have been. I also did a fair bit of wondering just how they might have been most likely to have planned to deploy him.

I came to the conclusion that the group was probably a dangerously pragmatic offshoot of the isolationist hard-liners. One that considered stopping the influx of Muggle-borns into the wizarding world more important than the ejection of the ones that already were there. And one that also was prepared to accept that halfbloods could serve a useful purpose if properly trained, and kept in their “place.”

By that point in time the aggressive recruitment of Muggle-born magical children had been underway for scarcely half as long as it has been today, and the percentage of Muggle-borns and halfbloods in wizarding society would have been a good deal smaller. Nevertheless, every year would not only have seen an additional handful of Muggle-borns enrolled at Hogwarts, but it would also see any number of pureblood families in good

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standing loose cadet branches due to young pureblood wizards and witches marrying “outside” and producing mixed-blood children, weakening the pureblood sector of the population by erosion. This could have only been regarded by the hard-liners as deplorable.

And into this situation, we then insert a sudden wave of Muggle-borns from the “baby boom” following the end of WWI and the Spanish influenza pandemic (assuming that these were duplicated in the Potterverse) who started showing up at Hogwarts in the Autumn term of 1931.



The year 1920’s birth records for Great Britain in the Real World registered some 1,126,800 births. This was the highest annual birth record for the whole 20th century. If the percentage of magical births within recorded mundane births was anything close to what it is as at the end of the century, this year would have accounted for well over a dozen Muggle-born First years a decade later, rather than the usual 7-8 or so. This baby boom would have continued for at least a few years to follow, gradually tapering off. Such a sudden increase of Muggle-born students at Hogwarts would have struck pureblood isolationists as a situation which required some sort of a response.

My contention was that this group was indeed intending a “takeover” of the British wizarding world. But not the kind of flashy, dramatic takeover that most fanfics have painted. Despite their own pureblood background and their conviction that pureblood wizards and witches were inherently superior to any other sort, I thought that Grindelwald’s geezers may



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have been prepared to deliberately capitalize on Tom's half-blood ancestry to initially broaden their faction's appeal to the wizarding public. They may have intended to use it as a selling point to make their message more palatable to the wizarding world as a whole, by promoting Tom as the perfect blend of the most illustrious wizarding ancestry and true "hybrid vigor." At least at the outset of their campaign.

Once they had him properly positioned to advance their agenda, they would gradually introduce measures to establish additional barriers to mixed-blood wizards' advancement, and possibly even some additional impediments regarding Muggle-born recruitment.

In fact, the more I considered the matter, the more likely it seemed to me that Grindelwald's geezers were above all, a bona fide *political* faction. One which was intending a perfectly legitimate political takeover of the Wizengamot, and by extension the Ministry of Magic and all of its policies.

— And yes, I agree that it would probably have been very dirty politics, by the time it was done, but it would have been made to *look* legitimate. Ultimately ending with Tom established as the Minister for Magic, and they, as they believed, his "handlers" ruling the ww from the Wizengamot. (More fools they!)

In short, Grindelwald and his geezers really were representative of a "legitimate" Nazi party, in contrast to the Death Eaters' "Klan."

The group, however wrong-headed, were not fundamentally stupid. They could see that their pureblood distinction was progressively being "eaten away" by the concessions that the Ministry was supposedly making to recruit Mudbloods and

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they believe that unless this trend was checked, ultimately no wizard would be free of Muggle "contamination," and, as far as that goes, they are right about it, too. They just cannot bring themselves to roll over and accept it.

Nevertheless, they realize that another open rebellion will neither succeed nor serve their ends. That they must somehow manage to work within the System to change the Ministry's policy. In order to do that, they realize that they must necessarily suborn the greater wizarding public as well as the Wizengamot into being led around to their point of view if they ever expect it to stick. And in order to do this they must make the supreme sacrifice and stoop to associating with and enlisting the active assistance of persons who do not meet their standards of purity of ancestry. They do not like this conclusion, but once reached, their leaders are pragmatic enough to not waste an excessive amount of time attempting to explain it away.

Some of these wizards may even be old enough to remember a time that the wizarding world regarded itself as being all but universally led by purebloods and, in fact, considered itself primarily *composed* of purebloods and "almost" purebloods (a viewpoint which was in itself a fallacy perpetrated by the Seclusion) and are drowning in nostalgia for their golden youth. In aid of all this they invoke, and probably distort, the memory of Salazar Slytherin and his known anti-Muggle biases as the justification of their "mission statement." [900 years earlier, considering the political situation in the mundane world, Salazar Slytherin may have had strong, rational, compelling reasons for his biases. We may never know for sure.]

Quite a few, although probably not all, of these geezers had



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been Slytherins in their school days, and, well, get a lot of the Old House boys together and eventually somebody is bound to drag out that old moldy fig of the legend of Slytherin's heir and the Chamber of Secrets. At this point they haven't a clue as to exactly they want to do about what they regard as being what is wrong with society, only that they know they need to do "something".



It was the sudden influx of much higher than normal numbers of Muggle-born students, born immediately after the conclusion of WWI, descending on Hogwarts in 1931 and afterwards that goosed the geezers into a redoubled determination to Do Something.

A few years prior to that point in time, they had been aware that there was still at least one known descendant of Salazar Slytherin left alive in the present day. A young witch.

[Until HBP, after all, we were led to understand that Tom Riddle's mother had been the very last of her family, not that she had both a brother and one surviving parent who both outlived her.]

And, unfortunately, this was a young witch who had walked away from her heritage after leaving Hogwarts in favor of life in a Muggle village. Which does not speak highly of either her appropriateness as their faction's "poster child" or say much for the likelihood that she would agree to being enlisted into the service of their goals in the first place. I suspect that these factors were quite enough to delay this gaggle of geezers from seeking her out, in favor of first trying to trace some more



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promising poster child for their budding movement.

By the time the sudden influx of the "wave" of Muggle-borns reaches Hogwarts, it is clear that there is no alternative Slytherin "heir" and they are too late. The witch is dead in childbirth, and her halfblood infant son is lost in some Muggle orphanage, which at that point in history characteristically changed the names of the children entrusted to them. (Certainly they changed the names of infants.) This development stumps the geezers temporarily, and the fact that the boy is a literal halfblood becomes an issue of considerable debate among them.

Somebody in their little clique, however, is placed fortunately enough to be able to get a look at the Hogwarts quill's enrollment list. He determines that if the missing child is listed, he is most likely to be the boy registered as Tom (Thomas?) Marvolo Riddle, born at the right general time, and since his name is on the list he will be getting a Hogwarts letter for the Autumn term of 1938. It's probable that it took the group a few years before they were resigned to tracing his mother (and him), and didn't locate him until he had been at the orphanage for some time.



Here's where things grow a bit murky. If the geezers had indeed decided to sponsor the boy for the sake of his Slytherin descent, we would have expected this group to send some plausible couple to adopt him out of this mundane institution, and see to it that he was raised within the wizarding world and taught some of his own history. Right? But, no. Nothing. They





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did absolutely nothing.

Maybe none of them could bear the thought of having to deal with Muggles (or had no idea of how to approach them). Maybe none of them really wanted to take on the responsibility for a small child. Maybe they collectively regarded the boy as no more than a potential tool and anyone else was welcome to raise him until he was old enough to be of use. If he came to grief before then, well, he obviously wasn't "worthy" of their attention, then, was he?

They might even have hoped that he would be made miserable by the Muggles who were in charge of his upbringing, since that would mean he would be all that much more willing to embrace their cause. We are talking about wizards who were sometime practitioners of the Dark Arts, after all, and subject to the sort of callous outlook and skewed perceptions that such practices tend to foster.

In any case, they didn't do a damn thing to get young Tom out of that orphanage. Instead, they either set one of their group in place at Hogwarts, or won a member of Hogwarts' staff over to their cause and waited for young Tom to show up at the school.

And when he did, they pounced.



We are talking about a child whose early upbringing was probably no kinder than Harry Potter's. In fact we are talking about a childhood that was probably much colder and less "personal" even if it might have entailed less direct hostility on the part of his caretakers. (Although if Tom had anything like the

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kind and number of magical breakthroughs that plagued Harry, such hostility might certainly have developed.)

And Tom's upbringing could well have been far less "normal" than Harry's. Where Harry had to cope with deliberate malice on the part of the Dursleys, and knew that their dislike for him was personal, Tom would more likely have been dealt with by the cool hand of indifference and an institutionalized atmosphere amounting to an exercise in dehumanization. And, as I've pointed out in various list postings, this was a child who did not get Harry's advantage of an early grounding of 15 months as a loved and wanted child. Nobody alive had ever loved Tom Riddle.

It must also be noted that, as horrible as the Dursleys are, they have no difficulty demonstrating love and affection to each other. In fact, Harry aside, they are a stickily affectionate family. Harry could still have recognized it by example, even if not by experience.

Much as the Dursleys may resent and fear Harry, his childhood was not spent in an environment which treated all children as interchangeable cogs in a machine, or which made a fetish of some majestic "impartiality." Current psychological research often suggests that if a child survives that kind of institutionalized "care," their emotional development may not proceed normally. Some literally do not know how to love anything, and often never develop the feeling that other people's emotions matter. This is the clinical definition of a sociopath. It is certainly a working definition of Tom Riddle.

I still contend that — the possibility of additional 3rd party tampering aside — most, if not all, of the psychological differ-



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ences between Harry and Tom can probably be traced to that critical 15 months of early parental love.



It must also be noted that most of the children raised in such impersonal circumstances as the young Tom Riddle, do *\*not\** develop this type or this degree of pathology. But a few unquestionably do. Tom appears to have been one of those few unlucky ones. He might have still been a monster and a menace even if he had been a Muggle like his father.

What is more, this boy — whom no one had ever loved — chose “greatness” and was sorted into Slytherin.

Into Slytherin, with all the “advantages” of mixed blood, grinding poverty and a Muggle upbringing. I really don’t think that the qualities that are valued in Slytherin House have changed markedly since Riddle’s day. You can imagine what his reception must have been. He may have managed to conceal the full truth of his parentage, (easy enough, since he did not know it himself) but his poverty and Muggle upbringing were plain for all to see.

And now, suddenly, there was an adult here who takes an interest in him! One who seems to *like* him! Somebody who knew his *family*! (Family: which is *highly* important in Slytherin House.)

Somebody who feeds him a grand tale of his noble, tragic mother and her perfidious Muggle husband. (And how would they have known anything of the sort? Did they make the tale up from whole cloth? No. They may have known that the witch’s paramour was alive, and yet her child was turned over

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to an orphanage. The cloth was provided. But the rest was embroidery.)

... Somebody who can indoctrinate him in the traditions of his proud Slytherin heritage. Someone who can coach him, and teach him, and guide his choices.

So long as he performs well.

And he does. Oh, he does.



His treatment at the hands of the Muggles who ran his orphanage gave him no defenses against this sort of approach. His inherent Legilimency skills were still rudimentary, and none of what his mentor tells him is a direct lie. When it turns out that he is a Parselmouth as well, this is hailed as a sign and a portent. His mentor flatters him by dubbing him the Heir of Slytherin.

Events in the Muggle world also conspired to give his new mentors an opportunity to take charge of him away from the halls of Hogwarts. At the start of Tom’s 2nd year, children were already being evacuated from larger urban areas to places of greater safety in the countryside. A 2nd wave of such evacuations was initiated with the German bombing of London in December of 1940, the following year. It is entirely possible that Tom’s London orphanage agreed to his being fostered in Hogsmeade or elsewhere in the countryside, although apparently Headmaster Dippitt did not remember this detail amidst the uproar related to the Chamber of Secrets in June of 1943. At that point Headmaster Dippitt did not even recall that young Riddle was not one of Hogwarts’s Muggle-born students.



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Like all children sorted into Slytherin, Tom soon hears about the legend of the Chamber of Secrets and begins his search for it as a symbol with which to prove his worth to his mentor and the rest of his patrons. Tom, most interestingly, apparently does not share this information with his sponsors once he finally locates Salazar's Chamber. Had he already seen through their intention to use him by then? Had he already begun to form his own goals separate from those of his patrons? This seems very likely.

For, unfortunately, their poster child was both a budding sociopath and a developing Legilimens, and he turned out to be much more intelligent, and far less grateful than they had assumed he ought to be.

A child to whom nothing in his earliest life was ever merely *offered*, who needed to take every advantage he has ever gained by means of subterfuge and stealth, does not typically learn the virtue of gratitude. At some point before his 5th year at Hogwarts he must have discovered how to hone his natural skills as a Legilimens to the point that he eventually saw through his mentors' rhetoric to their real opinions of the worth of a halfblood, however brilliant.



I thought that this discovery must have come as a profound disillusionment. One more in a series of already far too many personal betrayals, none of which he has ever been inclined to either forgive, or to overlook. By that point in the series (i.e., the 3-year summer), in all of his appearances on stage, if you try to squint past the bombast of what is always at least partially a



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"performance" (even if only to an audience of one) Voldemort's utter contempt toward wizards is just as clear to the reader as is his resentment of Muggles.

From all we had been told to that point, it also seemed to me that the young Tom Riddle was clearly being "groomed" for some purpose. Much as Harry is being groomed now.

Riddle's would-be handlers no doubt harped continually upon his early mistreatment at the hands of Muggles, intending ultimately to point him at Muggle-borns and tacitly tell him to eliminate them from the wizarding world. Quite overlooking the fact that Riddle would have had no inborn reason to love wizards, who had knowingly denied him his presumed birth-right by abandoning him to that orphanage.

But I think Grindelwald's geezers never actually saw the boy as anything more than a potentially useful tool. These were, after all, Dark wizards. And their blunted capacity for empathy gave the game away.

And, in any event, the fundamental damage to young Riddle had been done long before they ever got their hooks into him. The only way that anyone could have saved Tom would have been to have gotten him out of that orphanage and into an affectionate foster family before he had the chance to develop a sociopathic personality disorder in the first place.

But I suspected that once Tom saw through their intent to use him for their purposes, in a fury over this latest betrayal, he began to take steps to make himself much more powerful than they ever could anticipate or than they had ever intended, in order to prevent them from ever benefiting from any of *his* actions.





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I suspected that it was at this exact point, the point that he finally saw through their plans, that Defiant-Adolescent!Tom decided that he did not *choose* to be useful. He would not have his deplorable Muggle parentage paraded across the wizarding world, or his talents exploited to advance the aims of a lot of has-been losers.

No. *He* would use *them*!

And, at his earliest convenience, he shed the lot of them along with their plans for him with a public act of private murder, thereby killing four birds with three AKs.

And before the geezers had their wits about them enough to realize exactly what Tom had just set in motion, he had sweet-talked them into helping him disappear, and left them holding the bag.



Think about it. If Tom, no more than 18 years old, without any wide experience of the wizarding world (and where would he have gotten that, even if he had spent some summers and other term breaks in a wizarding household, having been evacuated from war-time London?) “disappeared” immediately upon leaving school — apart from that brief guest appearance in Little Hangleton — then he had almost certainly been in contact with someone who was able to help him do it. Even wizarding fugitives cannot typically “drop off the face of the earth.” Or, not without expertly placed help.

But by then he knew their party line backward and forward and could quote it chapter and verse. He knew who they were and the name of their organization. And when he decided it

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was time to make his move towards setting up his very own personal bid for power, he was able to reel the geezers and their descendants right back to his side, to serve him as *his* tools. Phrased in terms that they certainly “could” have, but probably “would” not manage to refuse. He has no intentions of ever fulfilling his promises to them. When they have served his purposes, he will see them slaughtered like sheep.



It seemed very clear to me that Albus Dumbledore and Tom Riddle may not have been the only people to disbelieve that Hagrid had any part in Myrtle’s death. But Tom had avoided suspicion and the 3rd party still wasn’t talking.

Another of the details attendant upon that particular miscarriage of justice that we still didn’t know, is whether or not Dumbledore was serving as Head of Gryffindor House at the time of Hagrid’s expulsion. Nor do we know if I am correct in my contention that, by that point, Hagrid was effectively Dumbledore’s ward, having been orphaned the year before. If this is the case, it stands to reason that Dumbledore would have known Hagrid. He would have known him very well, in fact, since you can just tell that Hagrid was the kind of youngster who is always in trouble of some kind or other, and had probably been so from the day he stepped onto the Hogwarts Express. But Dumbledore would have been convinced that Hagrid was no killer.

And, where Dumbledore had originally simply been somewhat cooler than the average Hogwarts instructor toward Riddle prior to Riddle’s part in Hagrid’s expulsion (due to a lack



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of sympathy with the family, or staff member who had taken the boy up, perhaps? This seems likely. He may in fact have regarded Riddle's mentor as a bad influence and had some reservations regarding Tom himself because of the association), afterwards he took a more personal interest in the boy. Enough that we can conclude that Dumbledore, who was certainly on Hogwarts staff in the spring of '43, when the Chamber was first opened, remained on staff there at least until the end of the summer term of '45 merely by the fact that the Chamber remained closed, primarily due to the eye that Dumbledore kept on Riddle.



Where I departed from most of the other fanon interpretations at that point is that I thought the incident which finally set Dumbledore on Riddle's track was not Hagrid's expulsion — which Albus, with his apparent habit of always making allowances, would have had to admit to himself could just as easily have been due to a well-intentioned misinterpretation of appearances on Riddle's part — but the massacre of the Riddle family in the summer of '45, which could not have been anything but a deliberate act of murder.

This event probably took place within a week after the summer term had ended and the Ministry investigators showed up at the Castle before the staff, or at least before Dumbledore, had departed for the summer.

Dumbledore may or may not have been reading Muggle newspapers at that point in his career, but it stands to reason that three AKs in a Muggle village would have eventually alerted

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some Ministry watch-dog.

The Department of Magical Law Enforcement is not run by a passel of Keystone Kops, either. Whoever is in charge of that Department is very well aware that once the borders maintaining wizarding Seclusion had become permeable enough to allow for a general recruitment of Muggle-born wizards, the proximity of a vast population of magically defenseless Muggles — many of them in affluent circumstances — will periodically prove to be an irresistible temptation to a certain element within the wizarding community. The additional disruption of a shooting war among these Muggles could have only worsened the inherent temptations attendant to the situation.

The DMLE almost certainly employs a group of people whose chief duty is to scan all Muggle newspapers for articles which indicate suspected use of magic outside the boundaries of the wizarding world. A "Mysterious No Cause of Death!" report being trumpeted about the tabloids in connection with a particularly sensational triple murder would certainly have prompted an investigation of some sort, even if only one which was attempting to more effectively cover up the probable use of magic in the attack. Frank Bryce's reported sighting of a pale, dark-haired teenage boy hanging about the place the night of the deaths would have led investigating Aurors back to Hogwarts where the name Riddle would have made a solid connection. It was this connection that marked the point of, and was the true reason for, "Tom Riddle's" long disappearance. Murdering Muggles is somewhat frowned upon, after all.





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Dumbledore had never much cared for Riddle's mentor or his mentor's world view, and once the Aurors showed up, he started following Riddle's backtrail. Somewhere, in this investigation I believe he, or they, came across Grindelwald (by whatever name. "Grindelwald" might have been no more authentic a name than "Voldemort").

I also believe that something, somewhere, in this investigation intersected with another matter that was already under investigation by the Ministry. Probably an ongoing investigation to do with indications of Dark Arts activity outside prescribed Ministry guidelines.

Dumbledore's information helped them to crack their case, and it was Albus, who, happily joining in on all of the excitement, was able to get close enough to come to grips with Grindelwald himself, and, when Grindelwald put up a fight, to defeat him.

Grindelwald was quite possibly not the same person as Tom's mentor at Hogwarts, or even the ringleader of the group, but it makes for a better "story" if he was one or the other, and he would at any rate have been the culprit that showed up in the cross-hairs of the two investigations.

Since it was not Grindelwald who had murdered the Riddle family, it would have been some other activity altogether for which he was prosecuted. And since the only thing we know of him is that he was a Dark wizard, it seems most likely that the shoal that Grindelwald wrecked himself upon was something to do with his practice of the Dark Arts.



As to Grindelwald himself; he was duly packed off to Azk-

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aban, and, as usually happens, went barking mad there. He probably either died before his sentence was served, or he was transferred to St. Mungo's upon its completion. Certainly Grindelwald himself is no longer an issue today. And who cares about the minor political scandals of 50 years ago?

As to Grindelwald's geezers; well, it certainly isn't illegal to believe that pureblooded wizards are better than any other sort. It isn't illegal to stand on a soapbox and preach that viewpoint in the middle of Diagon Alley, either. Nor is it illegal, however despicable, to indoctrinate unwitting schoolboys with the same views. Whatever Grindelwald, or his associates had ultimately planned may not even have gone far enough to have been shared throughout their own little clique. Let alone the whole of the Knights of Walpurgis.

To be sure, some of the other Old Boys in their private little clique undoubtedly had also been up to something which got them a stint in Azkaban, or a stiff fine, or a slap on the wrist. Others had broken no actual law and were merely somewhat publicly embarrassed. There wasn't necessarily anything the Ministry could do about them. And as far as the Ministry was concerned they had "nipped it" (whatever "it" was) in the bud, and there was no further danger.



I'm sure that Dumbledore who if nothing else, is a keen observer of human behavior, wasn't entirely convinced. And there remained still that small nagging detail of a fugitive paricide who had seemingly dropped off the face of the earth. I firmly believed that tracking Riddle's further suspected activi-



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ties became Dumbledore's own little pet project for the next 25 years, whether in some official capacity or as one of his private interests. (This was also back when we all thought Voldemort had first surfaced around 1970.)

I think that, since that day, whenever some charismatic figure raised his head in the WW outside the sanctions of some official Ministry position, Albus was quick to subject that figure to close examination in order to determine whether this might be Tom Riddle; and in 1970, he finally hit pay dirt.

In fact, Grindelwald's now largely forgotten aims are quite likely to have been very different from Riddle's current ones. We do not know anything of them for certain. And I suspected that Rowling would probably never fill us in. But, I thought that if Grindelwald was to be shown to have had any real significance in Rowling's story arc, it was well past time that his name be reintroduced. And that it had not tended to support the view that he was a minor nuisance that had been banished to the status of a mere footnote in history.

But I also suspected that If Grindelwald's plans had come to fruition, as he and his geezers intended, there would never have been a Lord Voldemort.

Of course, Muggle-borns would also no longer compose any part of the current student body of Hogwarts, either. Or the under-30 age group of the wizarding world in general. Wizarding Seclusion would be all but total. And Muggle-born wizards would be raising unintentional havoc out in the Muggle world, unable to get proper training.

And a certain Tom Marvolo Riddle, combining in one person both the Heir of Salazar Slytherin himself and the perfect "token"

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role model for wizards of mixed blood, might still be the Minister for Magic, wealthy, charismatic, popular, and set up with a fine house and a handsome, well-born, figurehead wife/hostess; actively — in fact, tirelessly — and most effectively furthering the aims and consolidating the advantages of Lucius Malfoy and his ilk.



Well it was fun at the time, anyway. A bit overheated and more fiction than theory. But given the vacuum we were working in as regards to any solid information, it wasn't all that bad. And if anyone is interested, like I say, the underlying factors which had contributed to this particular theory abruptly revived themselves in the summer of 2008, and have lurched back into play, now sans Grindelwald, and also sans a conspiracy. It now is over in the 'Missed Opportunites' collection under the name of 'Minding the Gap'.

Frankly, I think that in most respects the reprise is much better built than the version above, or, for that matter, the version that Rowling gave us, but the series isn't called "Tom Riddle and the Knights of Walpurgis," or even "The Adventures of Albus Dumbledore."

Although during parts of DHs you almost wondered why not.





## Coward & Oathbreaker

This is another old piece, dating from the 3-Year summer. A very minor theory which got shot off by HBP was my reading of the Coward and the Oathbreaker from Voldemort's speech in the Little Hangleton graveyard at the end of GoF..

First, some background: in the 11th hour before the release of OotP I had suddenly come to the conclusion that Severus Snape must indeed have managed to get to the meeting in the graveyard, after all. There was nothing in the course of OotP to contradict this reading and, indeed, Snape's position of trust with both his "principles" seemed to support it.

Most of the sticking point for me was that as the 3-year summer dragged on, it seemed more and more unlikely that the symmetry of three missing Death Eaters, balanced against our Pensieve attendance at three Death Eater trials (well, two trials and a plea bargain hearing) didn't mean something. These all had to be connected. And apart from Karkaroff's accusation, none of them had anything to do with Snape.

Well, evidently I was off admiring the Martian canals again.



**T**he longer I thought about it over the 3-year summer, the more reasonable it seemed to me to me that Snape *had* managed to show up for the graveyard muster and take his accustomed place in the circle. In which case it also seemed clear enough to me that it would have been Karkaroff that Voldemort referred to when speaking of the Oathbreaker.

Nevertheless, when his Mark began to return who did Igor go to? Not to Dumbledore (and why NOT Dumbledore? He

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knows Dumbledore's reputation.). He went to Snape, who, from Dumbledore's testimony at his own plea bargain hearing, he now believes to have been a Ministry spy. Which is to say, he went to Snape who he probably believes is the **ONLY** other person who is in the same boat he is in — that of a genuine ex-Death Eater with something to loose.

And Snape rebuffed him. Had Karkaroff gone to Dumbledore, some provision for his safety might have been made. (Post-HBP we could not be certain that one hadn't been. He was rather confidently assumed by all to be dead, yet no one admitted to having seen him die. Post DHs this scenario becomes rather unlikely. Post DHs it is also fairly apparent why he did not go to Dumbledore.)

According to Voldemort, the Coward will merely be forced to "pay" for his cowardice. The Oathbreaker will be killed. Given that the DEs know that Karkaroff sold them out in return for his own release from Azkaban, I could not really see Voldemort merely hitting him with a round of Cruciatus and keeping him on a short leash.

If the Oathbreaker was Karkaroff, and the Coward is indeed someone that we had already met by that point in the series, then he was almost sure to be Bagman. It seemed less than probable that the identities of the three missing DEs referred to in the graveyard speech were those of persons who had not yet been introduced by the time the speech was made. I concede that we had absolutely no certainty on this point. Voldemort could have been referring to completely unknown people, but that would be widely regarded as "cheating" on Rowling's part. (Not that such a possibility is beyond her, as we well know. But



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she didn't seem to be in the habit of doing it back then.)

Bagman had dodged the bullet at his trial by making himself out to be a simple dupe. Augustus Rookwood, his contact, was already under investigation. Consequently, Bagman betrayed no one, cut no deals and attempted only to save himself. And he did so without ill effect to any other person. The other DEs have no quarrel with him. In point of fact, he may indeed have *been* no more than a simple dupe — but if he was the “Coward,” he had formerly been admitted into Voldemort’s circle of Marked followers, and he had already been amply demonstrated to be one extremely shifty character. Truthfulness is not his main stock in trade.

Ludo Bagman, like Karkaroff, did a bolt by the end of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, under the very useful — and quite plausible — cover of dodging Goblin enforcers over a little matter of gambling debts. This may all be perfectly true. But it would not be difficult to believe that his real gamble was for another kind of stakes altogether. He had managed to squirm out of a tight spot a dozen years ago, he may very well have decided that he doesn't want to take any further personal risks, and to just sit this one out. In his case, I *could* see a bout of Cruciatus and being kept on a short leash as lying within the likely parameters.

I also thought that the relevant clue regarding the probability of Bagman’s involvement was tucked away in OotP’s iteration of the little capsule story of Regulus Black who joined up because there was nothing in his background to give him pause, and didn't like what he found when he got there — ultimately getting himself killed because of it. Rookwood was a personal friend of Bagman’s father. Ergo; Bagman was from the same

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demographic that most of the younger DEs were recruited from. He may not have liked what he found, either.

Bagman had his brush with Azkaban some 12–13 years ago and he is not going to take any risks that would put him in that kind of position again. There were probably several attendees of that gathering in Little Hangleton who were far from delighted to have the Dark Lord back in town. But Bagman was the only one of those who was fool enough to run.

Karkaroff, on the other hand, had deliberately sold out to the enemy, and sold out spectacularly. What is more, he stayed sold. He didn't have a choice. He didn't dare return. We saw not one action, reaction or statement from him which demonstrates the slightest regret for having made his peace with the British Ministry. He's a slimy specimen, but he's not a constant flip-flop. This, I thought, could well be the one who had “left forever.”

The identity of the Faithful Servant was no mystery. Despite strenuous attempts by some fans to give this one a more “dramatic” spin, the Faithful Servant was clearly Barty Crouch Jr, referred to as such all the way back in Book 4's first chapter and finally revealed to the reader when he dragged Harry off to his office after the return from the graveyard.

Which means that during the period that Harry was an unwilling guest at the feast Voldemort did not refer to Snape at all.



Well. Obviously THAT didn't pan out.

Oh, okay: Just for the fun of it, I'll spin you another little scenario. One in which Bagman is NOT the Coward, but IS a Death Eater.



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Bagman is pretty obviously a shallow, shifty specimen, and not really a “safe” associate, ex-DE or not. Those summons came at a very bad time for him. There he was, front and center, announcing the bloody Tournament, for all the wizarding world to see, for ghod’s sake. How is he supposed to get away to meet with the Dark Lord? And, worse, get back again without anyone getting suspicious?

Well, he doesn’t dare disobey, so he goes. He shows up at his accustomed place and manages to avoid special notice or to be singled out by name.

And, after the Potter kid makes his escape and the gathering is in an uproar, he just... doesn’t go back. He can’t. Somebody will put his absence at that specific time together with his arrest record and any rumors that might come out of this brouhaha, and his cover will be blown sky high. He’s ruined.

Unless he stays away long enough to allay suspicions by blurring any recollection regarding the timing of his disappearance.

Fortunately, his dealings with the Goblins offer an alternate plausible excuse for him to do a bolt right about now. He was always pretty low in the DE ranks and most of his contacts were usually through an intermediary. He hangs around after the circle is dismissed and explains the situation. Voldemort and Wormtail offer Bagman protection from the Goblins in return for taking up the job of errand boy. Pettigrew cannot be seen in public, and Tom’s extended plans for the evening have gone awry, so Voldemort can no longer depend on his faithful servant’s return. If Bagman is occasionally spotted there won’t be much harm done, since no one is supposedly after him but the Goblins, and Voldemort needs someone directly on hand

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while he is reestablishing his lines of communication and getting his organization restored.

And for the record: I’m not convinced there may not still be something in this one!

After all we don’t *know* that it wasn’t Ludo Bagman under one of those masks.





## The Sorting Hat Horcrux

Truth be told I was rather more annoyed about having this theory shot out from under me than a lot of the others. It was a fairly new one, I was pleased with it, and I wasn't at all ready to give it up quite yet. I was even more annoyed in that Rowling summarily shot it down and didn't even bother to give us something better in its place.

Of course, since she did it I've had a *major* epiphany regarding the creation of Horcruxes which contradicts it, so it wouldn't have played for me for all that much longer anyway.



**R**owling tacitly shot my replacement for this particular theory down, too. But I still think the theory of Horcrux creation that I and my fellow travelers worked out was much more elegant than Rowling's. Frankly, Rowling doesn't even appear to actually *have* any such answer as to how Horcruxes are created. But that has never stopped her from spouting out unconsidered statements that contradict other peoples' attempts. Consequently, I'm sticking to mine, thank you.

But that is neither here nor there.



The primary thing *against* this particular discarded theory, is the issue of timing. After the fandom finally had the information that Horcruxes were our underlying problem, a lot of us spent the following couple of years debating the mechanics and probable procedure of creating them.

Rather a lot of fans write fanfic, after all. An author ideally

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needs to have some idea about what they want to put in their story. And theorists will tinker with *anything*.

One of the earliest issues hotly debated was whether or not the Horcrux had to be made at the same time as the murder which went into making it. Due to some of the above unconsidered statements regarding Horcruxes which we had received from Rowling, I was inclined to drag my feet over whether or not the two needed to take place at the same time.

It was only after we got a few more cases of Rowling popping off with something that blatantly contradicted herself that I finally capitulated on the issue. The majority view on Horcruxes is that, yes, they have to be made at the same time, and in the same place, as the murder which creates them.

Which right off the top, disallows this one. Because the only way it works is if they don't.

Still, it was an interesting exercise in connecting dots. Even if the dots turned out to be illusory.

And, for the record, although I have indeed dispensed with the Sorting Hat as Horcrux theory, most of the rest of this reasoning is still in play. You'll find it repeated over in the essay on A Hogwarts Education over in the Oh Wide, Wide (Wizarding) World Collection.



Tom Riddle seems to have held back from attempting to create his final Horcrux of a projected set of six for something like 20 years. But he certainly didn't hold back from creating that final Horcrux for 20 years on the off chance that there might someday be a Prophecy out there with his name on it.



## The Sorting Hat Horcrux

I honestly think that he was reserving that last Horcrux for a particular murder. One that he had never managed to figure out a workable, risk-free way to accomplish.

I think he was saving that one up for the death of Albus Dumbledore.

But then the Trelawney 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. It was certainly a less risky one.

So. He would arrange for Dumbledore’s death by some other means. (Which is why I think Snape was really sent to Hogwarts, and expected to take the DADA position — which would assure that he would be out of the school within the year. He wasn’t sent in as a spy but as a potential assassin.)

All of which is a big whopping clue that if anyone is to figure out what that “mystery Horcrux” is they will need to determine it from Voldemort’s past actions.

And the probable effects of those actions.

And that we probably had all the puzzle pieces we need to do that by now.

If I was right, we have had some of those pieces for a Long Time now.

And we have done nothing but *complain* about them.



We the fans have been carping and creebing for years about the depiction of Slytherin House. Ever since about Book 2. (We mostly just accepted it in Book 1. Harry saw very little of Slytherin House in book 1. Just Malfoy and his goons, and

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the Quidditch team. And Snape who went out of his way to be combative.)

We have since been told outright that people trailed after young Tom Riddle, and later Lord Voldemort, for a pretty wide variety of personal reasons over the years. And Slytherin House doesn’t have a monopoly on any of them.

Doesn’t it begin to look just a bit suspicious that despite a fairly wide variety of reasons for people to tag along after Tom Riddle, such a whopping majority of his “future followers” seem to have landed in only *one* House?

In my own case; I have been grouching for years that Malfoy’s assumption of “entitlement” hadn’t anything to do with “ambition” by my reckoning.

It has finally caught up to me that this is not merely sloppy writing; this is a CLUE.



And now that we’ve met Horace Slughorn, it is even more obvious that Tom Riddle waltzed in and stole his House right out from under him.

Tom intended to do it literally, too. How long do you think Slughorn would have continued as Head of Slytherin if Dippet had given Tom the DADA position when he first asked for it at 18?

How long would Albus have survived as Deputy Head?

Tom Riddle already had three murders to his credit before he started his 5th year at Hogwarts. We saw him wearing the Peverill Ring during the discussion in Slughorn’s memory. We’ve been led to understand that he had created at least one of his earliest Horcruxes before he turned 17.



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Maybe we oughtn't to be off hunting Horcrux #5. Maybe we ought to be postulating the identity of Horcrux #4.

Or perhaps not. If each Horcrux created leaves a predictable visible effect upon the wizard who creates one, and his "elegantly wasted" appearance in the memory of his visit to Madam Smith is an indication of having only created his first one, then he was probably no more than four down when he turned up in Albus's office to request the DADA position. The Diadem, the Ring, the Locket, and the Cup. I'm no longer convinced that he'd already created the Diary at that point.

And when we saw him in back Slughorn's memory, he still looked perfectly healthy, and was actually wearing that Ring. Albus claims that he never did that after he'd turned it into a Horcrux. He had also looked healthy and normal in the Diary memories which were shown to Harry, as well. (And was not wearing any sort of ring, if one stops and thinks about it. And by that time Myrtle was already dead.)

Tom was not raised inside the wizarding world and he approaches magic without a lot of the limitations of vision that the wizarding-raised absorb in childhood about what one can and cannot do with it. Some of Tom's use of magic is a shockingly reckless affair.

One of his Horcruxes was calibrated to function as a potential weapon.

I think that one of the others was created to serve as a tool.

Or, in other words; I think that Tom Riddle nobbled the Sorting Hat.



## The Sorting Hat Horcrux

To do that, assuming that one *doesn't* need to accomplish the requisite murder at the same time as the Horcrux creation, he would have needed only to be left alone with it in the Headmaster's office for a few minutes and a relatively fresh murder on his record. I think that with all of his 6th year as an acknowledged school "hero," and all of 7th year as Head Boy, a resourceful young man like our Tom ought to have been able to manage that.

But, in fact, (apart from the uncertainty of when the actual murder must take place) I thought we may have actually watched him do it, when he came to ask Albus for the DADA position. The Hat sits on a shelf behind Albus's desk. Harry thought he saw Voldemort go for his concealed wand at one point during the interview.

At first we all believed that he was jinxing the DADA position. And if he could do that under Albus's nose he could certainly have nobbled the Hat under Dippet's, and why else should he ask for the DADA position at 18 if he didn't already have a well-developed plan to use it.

But in this, I think that I may have overestimated young Tom Riddle's wickedness. From the deterioration of his physical appearance between his leaving the ww around 1948 and his return a decade later, he had probably created only one Horcrux at the point that we saw him with Hepzibah Smith. And for that matter, the Sorting Hat does not sing the same song every year. Tom may not have remembered that the Hat was originally supposed to have been Godric's for some time afterwards.

I have since concluded that when he first asked Dippet for



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the DADA position, as a student himself, he may indeed have wanted no more than to remain at Hogwarts.



Oh, well, yes, he wanted to be Headmaster, someday, too. And he fully intended to become so as soon as he could manage it. But at that point he had no definite plans related to World Domination™. He was a sociopath, a murderer at least three times over, and was personally responsible for the death of a fellow student as well, but there was still some innocence left to him. I think World Domination was a bee that only got into his bonnet once he left school and was out in the world. While he was still at Hogwarts, his Ultima Thule was to stay there.

And while I am inclined to think that Albus may have been correct that Tom eventually would have chosen to move on, he might just as easily have been mistaken. (*Albus*, after all, had never chosen to “move on.”) The Headmaster of Hogwarts is a position of considerable prestige, after all. Tom wanted it. He intended that Hogwarts should be his.

And in any case; it's pretty clear that, at Harry's age, Tom Riddle had no intention of ever leaving the school. He wanted to stay there forever.

But eventually, during his first long exile, he might have remembered that the Hat had once been Gryffindor's.

From his viewpoint, the Sorting Hat might have been the perfect repository for a fragment of his soul. It was ancient, of immeasurable significance to the school, deeply associated and intimately connected to all four of the Founders. And even his enemies would be at great pains to keep it safe for him. For that



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matter, even Dumbledore had overlooked the fact that it had once been *Godric's* Hat when he made his statement that the only known relic of Gryffindor's, the Sword, had never been in contact with Riddle.

And in retrospect, that sounds like it ought to be a clue, too.

We need to ask ourselves the same question that Albus asked Riddle. Why did he travel so far on a nasty winter night to ask for a teaching position that he didn't really want and had no expectation of being given?

And while we're at it, why did he jinx the DADA position? What did he accomplish by that — apart from petty spite?



As to the first question; I think the original plan may have been to kill Dumbledore that night and make a Horcrux from his death.

So why didn't he?

Well he had been away for quite some time, hadn't he? And for that matter, he likes to have other people do his dirty work. So far as we know, he had never yet killed a wizard face-to-face, by that point, had he? He'd killed Muggles. He'd caused the deaths of two witches, both by indirect means, but we don't know of any point that he had stood up in front of a witch or wizard and tried to kill them in an open fight. I think Riddle got cold feet.

But he had killed before. And if the Hat became a Horcrux he must have had at least one past murder in reserve. We do not know whose. He could have already begun filling the lake with Inferi. Dumbledore's death could wait. The main item on





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his agenda that evening was to create his Horcrux.

And we saw him do it. Rowling isn't consistent in her presentation of the use of wands. Hell, she isn't consistent in her use of *magic*. But we've all seen magic performed without a wand from time to time. Even Harry managed it once by making his wand light up so he could find it when he had dropped it during the Dementor attack at the opening of OotP. Voldemort may not have needed to actually have his in his hand in order to nonverbally direct a fragment of his shredded soul across the room into the Hat.



So why should he curse the DADA position?  
How about as a diversion?

He couldn't count on Albus not noticing the twitch of his hand toward his wand, so he needed to give Albus some other reason to account for it. He cursed the DADA position (or maybe just the classroom) on his way down the stairs to the Entrance Hall, or from a distance afterwards, but that is not what we saw him do in Albus's office. What we don't know is whether Albus really bought the story or not.

But the jinxed DADA position would have been apparent by the end of June, whereas the Sorting Hat wouldn't have been used until the following September. And Albus was a busy man, new in his position, and probably had agendas of his own to pursue.

Which also means that the Lord Voldemort whose appearance anyone in the wizarding world actually remembered was some intermediate stage between the melting wax image of his

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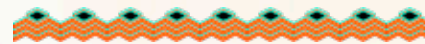
interview with Dumbledore and the Lord Scaly-Face that Harry met in front of the Mirror of Erised. By the time he reached the Hog's Head the transformation may have already been complete. If not, it would have been over some weeks or months afterward. The eyes were probably now red, although the pupils may still have not yet become slitted, his features would have become more flattened and mask-like and the waxy look may have begun to look scaly. Anyone who saw him then (and that would have been few people apart from his closest followers) would have recognized him upon his return, although they would have been likely to think that they had disremembered just how frightening he looked rather than to have realized that, yes, he really did look even worse than before.



Like I said, I wasn't quite ready to retire that one at the time. Although before much longer I would have done so anyway.

All I can say is that I didn't think all that highly of the Ravenclaw diadem as presented, either. I thought that there ought to have been more of a clue to the reader over the first six books so they might have at least had a fighting chance of being able to figure it out for themselves. Without sufficient build up, it just comes across as making things up at the last moment and bunging them in all anyhow. What harm would a bit more of a hint have done, eh?

And when the final Horcrux did turn out to be Nagini, I was indeed disgusted.





## The Pettigrew Puzzle

Well, for a long time, I, as well a lot of Rowling's other older fans, was convinced that Pettigrew would somehow turn out to be highly significant.

We all had a fine old time laughing up our sleeves at the kids whose fanfics completely omitted him from their whole story because "they didn't like him," secure in the certainty that Rowling would bring him back at the grand climax to do something that would be majorly important to the final outcome. Even if he did it completely unwittingly or unwillingly.

Well, it turns out that the kids were right. Pettigrew, in the end, was completely disposable. Even Rowling doesn't seem to have known quite what to do with him after GoF.

Or how to get rid of him, either. Ultimately she hustled him offstage with neither a bang nor a whimper, indeed with no more than a split-second of hesitation and not even the breath for a squeak.

Talk about an anti-climax...



I had invested a great deal of time watching Peter Pettigrew over the course of several years, so I will have to admit to having been somewhat miffed by his ignominious exit. Not really much more than that, though. By the time Peter Pettigrew made that final exit the whole series had become such a train wreck that I couldn't really get particularly het up solely on his account.

Still, several years of Pettigrew-watching had resulted in the generation of a couple of theories which ended up being unequivocally hosed. Most of my observations on his character

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still remained fairly sound. But the theories were hosed entirely. So they have taken up residence here in the 7th Son elephants' graveyard of dead theories.



Theory #1; although in the wake of HBP this one was already looking like a rather unlikely possibility, it was still arguable that by the time we caught up to him, Peter may have gained a slight artificial advantage.

There had earlier been sufficient canon evidence to strongly suggest, if not to absolutely confirm that, having led the Dark Lord to the slaughter, Wormtail was also at the house in Godric's Hollow the night of Voldemort's defeat.

In CoS Dumbledore directly told us that Harry absorbed "some of Voldemort's power" when the curse rebounded and destroyed the Dark Lord. Was this simply due to the dynamics of the Changeling hypothesis? Did Harry have some of Voldemort's power because Harry inadvertently become Voldemort's 6th Horcrux? Was this because Harry was the original focus of the rebounding curse?

Or was it merely because he was the nearest living person in range?

Was he the *only* living person in range?

Not if Peter was also there.

Could Peter have also been carrying some newly acquired magical power that he did not have when he was back in school when he confronted Sirius the next day? Is it significant that Voldemort planned his return to the physical plane around the creation a simulacrum by the use of the flesh of this *particular*



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servant, as well as the blood of Harry Potter? (“When shall we three meet again?”) Because he clearly did plan it that way. Voldemort tells us as much in the first chapter of Goblet of Fire. Voldemort doesn’t *always* overlook major details in a complex puzzle, you know.



For that matter, we also had the nagging problem of the ruined house to juggle. I have no clear idea of what Rowling means by the ruined house. While we have been shown in canon that the AK curse is destructive to inanimate objects, it is a bit of a stretch to suppose that a single rebounding AK (which actually *found* a living target) would generate enough force to destroy a house.

And, for that matter, I doubted very much that the curse that Voldemort tried to kill Harry with was an AK, too.

Was the destruction of the house an indication that the curse Voldemort threw at Harry Potter was *not* an AK, but some specific Horcrux-creating curse instead? The Priori Incantatum on his wand at the end of GoF gave us no clue of what curse he used to try to kill *Harry*. In fact, unless Lily’s echo served as the log entry for that curse, the Priori Incantatum skipped right over it.

So was the damage to the house because a — to us — unfamiliar, and improperly grounded curse went violently wrong?

Or might the damage to the house at Godric’s Hollow have been Pettigrew’s own contribution to the ongoing confusion about just what happened there? Perhaps the entrapping and framing of Sirius Black was not the first time that Pettigrew

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had explored the possibilities inherent in the Muggle gas mains.

For that matter, if the “secret” he was keeping was the Potters’ *location*, rather than the Potters *themselves*, would destroying the house have broken the secret without anyone ever knowing who the Secret’s keeper had been?

Because we’ve now seen in canon that just *sharing* the secret does not break it. And if it was the Potters *themselves* that were hidden, the secret ought to have still held, since Harry was still alive. And if killing Lily and James would have broken the secret, then there would be no need to damage the house to conceal the identity of the Keeper.

So. Do the bindings between Harry and Voldemort actually go three ways to include Peter Pettigrew, who arguably may carry some power from Voldemort, owes a wizard’s debt to Harry, and whose very flesh was used to facilitate Voldemort’s return?

Questions, questions.

None of which Rowling ultimately chose to answer.



Additional Theories; I very much doubted that Pettigrew turned his coat on his own initiative. For one thing, Pettigrew is too lazy. For another, we don’t really hear that he had a lot of other friends, do we? I really do think that outside pressure was probably brought to bear. Originally.

If this is the case, Peter’s big mistake was to look the other way when he first started drifting into a position where he was being pressured to go in a direction he had not ever considered taking, and letting whatever control he had over the situation



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be taken out of his own hands.

After all, it would have been *uncomfortable* to look the situation in its face. And Peter Pettigrew very much prefers his comfort, if he can get it. Rowling has Albus Dumbledore making a fine-sounding statement that it is important to resist the temptation to do what is easy instead of what is right, but we have seldom seen *Harry* being offered any easy choices. (Although *Albus* certainly was offered the choice of sitting on his arse and doing nothing for years, and seems rarely to have failed to exercise that choice, too.) If Rowling had any real intention of following through on this statement and showing an illustration of this kind of choosing (and it wouldn't be the first time she didn't follow through on something that she'd pointed out to us and flagged as important) this must be something that we were going to have to witness by example. Somebody *else's* example. Someone *other* than Harry.

And while we have shining examples of this kind of failure in both Albus and Horace Slughorn, Pettigrew does appear to at least be another viable possibility for an example of failing to rise to meet this particular challenge. If he'd been more alert he might have spotted the danger signs. If he had been more committed to the Order, he would have refused to cooperate. In either case, what he'd have done about the threat it we'll never know. But what he did do, I think, was to start weaving himself stories about how, yes, he was on top of the situation and that none of the information he was passing was doing any *real* harm. Certainly no harm to *James*.

And I doubt that the information he started out passing was even particularly dangerous, either. But it just didn't stop there.

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I didn't think Peter made any snap decisions about changing his alliances. He was passing information to a DE, or DE-sympathizer for an extended period of time before he made that final decision to throw in his lot with the DEs. And over that period he was not yet either a Death Eater himself, nor even a true supporter. He was an informant. Over the year (at least) that he is now known to have been spying, he was almost certainly reporting by way of an intermediary. I think he had not yet taken the Mark.

And his intermediary is almost certainly one of the DEs who ended up in Azkaban. It was in Azkaban that Sirius Black heard his fellow prisoners muttering about "Wormtail."

This reading is also, by-and-large, the official Ministry interpretation for the activities that they have assigned to Sirius Black, as summarized by Fudge in the *Three Broomsticks*. The Ministry was wrong in their assignment, but there is no reason to believe that they were necessarily wrong in interpreting the backtrail of leaked information.



Much of the above obviously is "educated" speculation. But, from this point, just about everything I've got is pure speculation. So far, it all complies with what we've been able to pick up from canon.

Indeed, the very consistency with which Rowling deflected any attention directed at Pettigrew made me suspect that the truth could be something quite other than Sirius Black's oh-so-certain interpretation of deliberate treachery. I began to wonder whether Pettigrew may have managed to trap him-



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self in a daydream. And, we know the regularity with which wizards are capable of convincing themselves of six impossible things before breakfast.

After all, it isn't like Rowling hasn't managed to up-end just about every *other* piece of information she has ever given us through "the Sirius filter."

And, then, we do also have to at least consider Pettigrew's own statement on the matter when we cornered him in PoA. Could he have legitimately been trying to *explain* himself? When he claimed that he never meant it to happen, could he have possibly been telling the truth? Or at least an imperfect *version* of the truth?

Well, just barely.

Particularly if you can entertain the possibility that from Peter's end of the equation the target wasn't ever James, but *Sirius*.

You see, at that point I also rather thought that it was Peter, if anyone, who struck up the original friendship with James Potter on the Hogwarts Express so beloved by fanon. I thought that Sirius Black had probably been stuck in a compartment with his female cousins, who had been told to watch him, and keep him out of trouble.

I thought that it wasn't until after they had all been sorted into Gryffindor that James and Sirius hit it off like long-lost brothers (They *were* actually cousins), and Peter suddenly found himself left out in the cold.

Peter spent the following 7 years trying to get closer to James, to edge Sirius out of the way, and take his place. And Sirius kept rubbing Peter's nose in the fact that he came in a distant third.

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But, I did think that pressure was brought to bear. Possibly even before the Trelawney Prophecy was made, or the Order of the Phoenix founded. Although that was far from certain.

It was probably quite soon after James Potter first showed up on the DE's radar, anyway. James supposedly had at least three narrow escapes before the Prophecy was made. And just because Sirius calculated that Pettigrew had been spying for a year before Voldemort's fall, does not mean that it might not have actually been longer. Peter was not a DE yet. The DEs whose Azkaban mutterings Sirius based his calculations on may not have known about "Wormtail" any earlier than the very end of the Dark Lord's rise. Peter wasn't a part of the "Brotherhood." He wasn't even an associate, he was an informant. Whoever he was informing would not have been bandying his code name about in meetings. He was a resource that needed to be kept under wraps.

Still, for all that it was James as well as Sirius who had "gotten him into this mess" (by Peter's reasoning), James had still once been Peter's *friend*, and the people he was now dealing with *weren't*.

I really don't think that Peter started off passing information that ended up endangering James and the rest of his circle with any degree of eagerness. In fact, the founding of Dumbledore's Order of the Phoenix may have served as a welcome distraction in that it enabled Peter to pass information on plenty of other desirable targets, instead. For quite a few years I firmly believed that the core of the Order was made up of people who



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had all escaped Voldemort's attentions, or those of the DEs. In Peter's own mind he was probably still being a loyal friend to James Potter. For quite a while, too.

And Peter thought that he was getting away with it, and, of course, he assumed that his luck would hold.

He also didn't volunteer the information that the Order had anything to do with a couple of children (note: hardly surprising. Peter never volunteers information of any kind). And Voldemort's agent, Peter's "handler," not knowing about the Prophecy, never knew to ask about that. And so matters rested.

Until finally the Dark Lord made up his mind to attack the Potters. And to do it personally.



By that time Voldemort's rise was well into its most extravagantly violent phase, and it was widely known throughout the wizarding world that if the Dark Lord wanted you dead, then you were going to die. And Peter now had to consider where he'd be if/when the Potters died.

Could he manage to conceal the fact that he had been stringing the Dark Lord along for the past two years by deflecting him to other targets? Once the Potters were dead, would Voldemort simply pick the rest of the Order off one at a time, *including* Peter — considering him of no further use? The Dark Lord would not extend any sort of clemency to Peter unless Peter actively *supported* him would he?

Maybe the safest course to take was to make sure that Voldemort never *found* the Potters?

Only; James didn't accept Dumbledore's offer to be his

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Secret Keeper when the subject first came up. And now that they've investigated that spell, James wants Sirius to be his Secret Keeper.

That's just too risky a situation. Besides, Peter has been pushing Sirius's buttons and encouraging him to suspect everybody but himself for years. Successfully.

It's not that Sirius is stupid, it's not that Sirius isn't a powerful wizard — for his age — and he's certainly loyal to James. But if he bollixes up this job where will Peter be?

And there is nothing that Peter could say that would convince Sirius to turn the job over to Dumbledore. Not now, Not knowing how they had all hoodwinked the old man when they were still in school.

Besides, Dumbledore doesn't really *like* any of them, except maybe Lily. Peter can tell that much. The Potters don't matter nearly as much to Albus as the Longbottoms.

But if Peter played Sirius right — and it was laughably easy to play Sirius Black, you just couldn't get *rid* of him — he might be able to convince Sirius to turn the job over to Peter.

Wait a minute.

Maybe one *could* get rid of him.

After all, no one would suspect *Peter* of being the Potters' Secret Keeper. He would be able to play dumb on that issue and make himself useful to the Dark Lord in various other matters, and have himself covered both ways.



I still really do rather think that Peter may have intended to go on keeping the Potter's secret location in reserve as he



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worked his way up through the DE ranks. He didn't originally turn his coat on his own initiative, but once he started to actually consider the possibilities, he gradually began to see vast opportunities for someone of his particular talents.

Face it, even as a member of the Order, Peter knew he would never in a million years have been able to make himself indispensable to *Dumbledore*. And in Voldemort he may have believed he had found himself a leader who could offer him just about everything he had ever wanted. In spades. And no lack of little weaknesses for him to exploit, either.

But Sirius Black would have to be gotten out of the way once the substitution was accomplished. You can play him easily enough, but you can never count on him not to suddenly put two and two together later. And that would be bad. Just... no, better not to even think of it. Peter is a master at not thinking of what he doesn't want to think of.

And it was *Sirius* who had always discounted and jeered at Peter, too. Even when they were all boys back in school. *Especially* when they were all boys back in school.

No. Sirius had to die. Even if James and Lily didn't. Or, at any rate, not yet. Once Sirius was dead, and everyone believed that *he* had been the Secret Keeper, then no one would expect to be able to find the Potters.



We all keep overlooking the fact that Sirius had arranged to check on Peter the night that the Potters were killed. And Peter *knew* this. He may have expected to be back at his hideout before Sirius turned up.



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It is also very possible that Peter being a no-show for this arranged visit was intended to lead Sirius into an ambush.

Given that anyone might have predicted that Sirius's first action upon finding Peter gone would have been first to check on the Potters' safety, I am inclined to think that this may have been what Peter intended.

But still, the fact that Peter was *not* at his hideout when Sirius showed up may be the first indication that something had gone badly awry.

Peter would have wanted to see to it that Sirius was eliminated fairly quickly. But he probably did expect to have at least some time to make arrangements. And I suspect that what he intended to arrange was a presumed Death Eater attack, possibly on his own hideout, in which Sirius Black would be killed. And to do this, he had to get an official hand in with the Death Eaters. He had to actually join them.

Consequently, I believe that Peter had fully intended to be snug and safe in his hideout by the time Sirius showed up to check on him.

It was at this point that Peter's house of cards collapsed around his ears.



About a week after the Potters went into hiding, which happened to be Halloween night, self-anointed "Secret Agent Pettigrew" set up his big bluff. Made his big mistake. He agreed to take the Dark Mark. And he intended to finger Sirius Black as the Potters' Secret Keeper.

We'd been told by Karkaroff that no one but Voldemort





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knew the names of all his followers (a statement which has been called somewhat into question by the fact that the group of raiders who were smuggled into Hogwarts at the end of HBP didn't even bother to wear their masks). And Pettigrew was known by Voldemort to be an informer inside Dumbledore's Order whose identity required protection. If there was any kind of an assembly, Peter was introduced to it, if at all, simply as "Wormtail." But it is far more likely that the meeting was between Voldemort, Peter, and Peter's intermediary alone. Voldemort welcomed Peter, and marked him. And Peter met the Dark Lord's eyes.

And Voldemort is a Legilimens.

And Peter was trapped.

It seems clear from everything he ever said in PoA or GoF that Sirius Black had never heard of Legilimency — not until someone had explained it to him by the opening of OotP. Legilimency and Occlumency are described as an obscure branch of magic. They are not on the Hogwarts curriculum. I tend to suspect that as far back as 1981 none of the Marauders (apart from, possibly, Lupin) were aware of it. Peter had no idea of what he was walking into.

He had only been keeping that particular Secret for about a week, it was at the forefront of his mind. But he had also only just come forward to join the DEs. He went into his usual emergency tap-dance to the tune of not having wanted to entrust this information to anyone but the Dark Lord *himself*, and he may have convinced himself of it well enough for Voldemort to sit back and claim to accept the story.

And then Voldemort made his announcement to anyone who

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was in attendance (possibly only Peter's handler) that Wormtail had brought him a wonderful present, and that he was off to visit the Potters. Insisting that Peter accompany him so he could see the fruits of his "loyalty" to himself. And dismissed the others.

Snape, who was not present at that meeting (he had a cover at Hogwarts to maintain) alerted Dumbledore when his Dark Mark disappeared; which is what alerted all of Voldemort's followers to the fall of the Dark Lord.

To the remaining DEs it would have sounded as if "Wormtail" had shown up out of the blue and immediately led their Master into a trap.

And it would have been a few weeks before anyone knowing of the existence of Wormtail showed up in Azkaban to start fulminating against him.

At this point that narrows it down to Rookwood. But there may have been other DEs unmasked after the Dark Lord's fall as well. Three of the Azkaban escapees in OotP are still unnamed. And for that matter we now know that Yaxley was also employed at the Ministry. But if Yaxley was the contact, there is no link to Azkaban, since Yaxley seems to have managed to have escaped suspicion in the wake of VoldWar I.

And, with the effect of the Dementors hanging over him, Sirius wasn't likely to have taken much of an interest until the name "Wormtail" was actually brought up.



But, in any case, as of HBP I was convinced we hadn't seen the last of Peter Pettigrew. Not by a long shot. I couldn't believe



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that Rowling was keeping him in the background the way she was without a reason.

And, we still didn't know just where in the equation regarding the problem of Lord Voldemort and his multiple Horcruxes Peter Pettigrew actually fit.

Well. Silly me.



## Redeeming the Potterverse

### Historical Note:

This exploded theory was rather annoying to have to abandon, back when the explosion first took place, since part of it was quite new and the rest had been spun off from an essay that my site was rather well known for. Indeed, at that point the most recently developed portion had only just crystallized a couple of months before HBP was released, and it went against the grain to have to excise the relevant part of it from the portions which were still in play.

I am of course referring to original components of the Changeling Hypothesis/Premature Prediction essays which used to be listed in the Harry Potter & the Dark Lord Collection. Both of these articles have been extensively rewritten and no longer exist in their original forms, under their original names, or in their original locations. This piece is effectively an attempt at a restoration of the original premise.

In their original forms, they constituted an extrapolation of the sort of redemption pattern that a fair-sized segment of the fandom was altogether convinced that Rowling was deploying, and indeed that Rowling herself appeared to be hinting at in most of her interviews. It must be admitted that I did not ever expect these theories to be altogether correct. But I did have some expectation of there being at least *some* correspondence with the eventual reveal in at least a few particulars.

In any case, these were not among the original essays of the collection. All of those went up at the end of April of 2003. The Changeling Hypothesis wasn't posted until something like a full month later. But for some years it was probably the most well-known of any of the essays in the collection (although by



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this time I can no longer be sure whether that statement still applies). It's also the essay in which I came closest to getting it right. After HBP my accuracy rating fell off rather dramatically.

I'll admit to being just a bit miffed. Not so much because what I had extrapolated turned out to not be what Rowling claims happened, (which is always the risk you take if you are going to stick your neck out and expound on theories) as that it ultimately became clear that Rowling seems not to have intended *anything*. For, despite shooting down my theories, (which I thought were rather nicely constructed) she offered nothing whatsoever — let alone something *better* — to put in their place.



### The Changeling Hypothesis/Premature Prediction (Original Redemption scenario iteration, circa Easter, 2003)

**A**ccording to the original iteration of the Changeling hypothesis, the nature of the connection which indubitably exists between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort is that from the point that Voldemort's killing curse rebounded and destroyed his mortal body, Harry Potter has been the repository of Tom Riddle's soul.

Not merely a portion of it, as turned out to be the case in canon once we knew about the Horcruxes, but his *entire* soul.

The "soul" is generally regarded to be the seat of the emotions and of self-awareness. Those who have been administered the Dementor's kiss have no such awareness, no kind of feelings or judgment and without such self-knowledge are unable to even access their own memories. Nor do they exhibit any signs

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of their original character. They might as well be Inferi, except that they lack an Inferus's sense of purpose.

Well, that and that their bodies are, at least temporarily, still alive. Lord Voldemort should have been aware of this.

However, we have been given no indication whatsoever to lead us to suppose that Lord Voldemort places any particular value upon human emotions. From his statements and those statements of 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 memories would be preserved and would remain functional, whatever befell his physical body, without any further consideration for his soul.

Therefore, apart from binding his soul to the physical plane, which was necessary to prevent it from passing through the Veil, he paid it no further attention and concentrated all of his efforts upon safeguarding his consciousness, his memories and his self-awareness; hedging them about with whatever immortal qualities and protections he could either steal or create.

Harry, an immature, human entity, seems to have been left with no memory of the event that Changed him, beyond that of his mother's voice, a high, cold laugh, and a green light.

Voldemort, a mature, composite human/non-human hybrid entity, seems to have been left with only a memory of "pain beyond pain"

I believed that in Voldemort's case this was only due in part



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to the destruction of his physical body. When his safeguards against death were actually invoked by the rebounding curse, somewhere in his preparations to protect himself he had made a serious miscalculation. He, of course, did not realize this.



For a while after HBP was released I felt just a bit smug about this theory. My *original* theory was clearly not being directly supported by JK Rowling, but I had picked up on two of the major issues related to it. And I seem to have gotten those bits as solidly right as anybody is likely to have managed to do anywhere in fandom. Lord Voldemort had indeed managed to store his “life” somewhere outside his physical body, and yes, a part of that “life” was now to be found in Harry Potter. But, on the whole, in its original form it wasn’t so much that I was “on the right track,” as that I had somehow hijacked the engine and taken a joyride in it a mile or three down my *own* track.

With HBP, a major flaw was revealed in my hypothesis. I had not anticipated that Lord Voldemort had split his soul up into separate pieces. But the underlying premise turned out to have still been remarkably sound, so at that point, the theory was reworked rather than abandoned.

As we get farther downstream from the closing of canon, however, I begin to think that now, some 15 years and counting later, perhaps I ought to take the time to separate out any actual attempts to understand and explain the creation of Horcruxes and put them into their own essay series, and attempt to recall the original theory of the Changeling hypothesis, which *did* indeed very closely resemble the concept of a Horcrux,

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without actually being one.

For, unfortunately, once the concept of Horcruxes had been introduced to canon, it raised the question of; just how *does* one create a Horcrux? And, also unfortunately, this issue was major enough for it to have hijacked the entire essay for upwards of a decade.

Since I am now attempting to drag attention back to the original starting point, those extrapolations are not required here.



Let’s introduce a bit of historical context, here.

My original theory got kicked off when something rather interesting cropped up over on the old HP for Grownups list on AOL about six weeks before the release of HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX. The traffic on that list crowded me out after the 5th book was released, but I had posted there fairly regularly up to then.

A member who signed him/herself as The Admiring Skeptic made the observation that the climax of the first four books had *all* hinged upon a mistaken/false identity.

It should be noted that however accurate this statement may have been at the time it was made, this turned out to be a device which was conspicuously *absent* in OotP, and remained so ever after, (although if it had actually had anything to do with the *plot*, the systematic deconstruction of Albus Dumbledore’s character over the course of DHs might certainly have qualified). In its place we had cases of false information, unknown motives and mysterious conspiracies.

However, back in 2003 The Admiring Skeptic proposed that



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on the strength of the observation, something to do with “identity” was in fact the underlying theme of the series. S/he further proposed that Rowling was steadily building up to a truly MAJOR case of mistaken/false identity as the series’s climax. S/he also made about an 80% convincing argument that this bombshell was emphatically not the tired old Star Wars “I am your father, Harry” retread beloved of some sectors of fanon at that time, but that Harry Potter and Tom Riddle themselves are in fact the same person.



In its original form that theory hung upon the claim that Lord Voldemort was attempting to become immortal by wiping out both his own ending AND his beginning in order to reign thereafter as a sort of Dark God. To this end, at some point in the year before his fall, he brought his own infant self physically forward in time to be murdered according to some Dark ritual. The child!Riddle was rescued by James and Lily Potter who, adopted him and transfigured his features to resemble their own in order to conceal his identity. No one else but Dumbledore (and eventually, Voldemort) being aware of the truth.

Like a lot of fan theories, it was way too complex for everyday use, but the reasoning (in its entirety) *almost* worked. Just... not *quite*. It also depended far too heavily upon time travel paradoxes which are always unstable, unreliable, and next to impossible to pull off convincingly.

This Adopted!Harry theory, understandably, sparked a lot of discussion and quickly reached the point of inspiring spin-offs.

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We were soon given the “Harry is Tom’s missing twin” variant. Which does not discernibly improve matters and undermines the original concept’s significance. I cannot recall if there were any others which were even that coherent.

I found myself exploring an alternate interpretation, which eliminates the time travel paradox by invoking and substituting the ancient and honorable folkloric tradition of the Changeling.

At that time (about May, 2003) it seemed reasonably sound to me. The very fact that we were apparently dealing with a “deathless” Dark Lord was in itself a whopping big clue, suggesting that one might do well to check out the methods used by other deathless evil Enchanters, and suspiciously deathless bad guys in folklore, of which there is no shortage. After my first reading of Phoenix my own variation on the theme still seemed reasonably sound, although the odds that JKR would choose to go there didn’t seem particularly high. But, after a later reread of Phoenix it looked as if I might have dismissed that possibility a little early. Some of the implications in Book 5 (although perhaps not the overt statements) turned out to be surprisingly supportive of my interpretation.



In the wake of Half-Blood Prince, it was clear that my reasoning was a bit off.

Still, I did actually *hit* the target. Just... not in the gold. Clearly, Harry Potter had *\*not\** become the repository of Tom Riddle’s soul. He only had been lumbered with a *piece* of it.

My original Changeling Hypothesis had also appeared to have the very real advantage of offering us a welcome expla-



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nation to resolve the glaring discontinuity between the glimpse of Lord Voldemort which we were given at the end of Goblet of Fire, and all of those earlier accounts of the compelling and charismatic leader that he is presumed to have been before his first defeat in order to have initially won so much alleged popular support, and to have attracted so many devoted followers to his stated cause.

What we were shown in GoF simply does not square with those accounts. The creature we were shown in the graveyard of Little Hangleton is something that no one in their right mind would follow on any consideration whatsoever, apart from that of fear or force.

On this particular matter, post-HBP it turned out that we seemed to have been deliberately pushed into reasoning from a false premise from the very beginning. For, despite having — over the course of the first five books — *repeatedly* directed the reader to believe that at one time Lord Voldemort had commanded a wide following and at least some degree of public support, if we *accept* the “official Riddle backstory” as presented in HBP, Ms Rowling finally made it clear that this could never have been the case. Unless Albus Dumbledore’s Pensieve presentation of the Life and Times of T.M. Riddle was a fabrication in itself, the whole premise of any former wide popular support of Lord Voldemort had to have been an illusion. It had probably *always* been an illusion. For what Albus’s presentation *showed* us was the rise of a powerful gang “Boss” who had been an outlaw from the get-go.

Whether this was due to a change of intention on Ms Rowling’s part, clumsy handling of a perception shared by most of

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the characters which was always *intended* to eventually be revealed to be false, or whether it was a case of sheer authorial cluelessness, I hesitate to say. But the implication that Tom Riddle had garnered a wide following and a great deal of public support is certainly stated in the first five books, and it is just as certainly, and conclusively refuted by the sixth. On the subject of Tom Riddle, in HBP Rowling sprung even more of a reversal upon the reader as she later attempted regarding Severus Snape.

And, as with Snape, I thought that this might not be the last such reversal that she intended to spring on us, either.

However, these inconsistencies in the presentation of Tom Riddle and his allegedly vast public support, however relevant to the series as it stands, is peripheral to an examination of the Changeling Hypothesis, and better explored elsewhere. Such as in the character studies related to Tom Marvolo Riddle.



The Admiring Skeptic’s premise (that the Harry Potter we know is in fact the same entity who formerly existed as Tom Marvolo Riddle) was an intriguing one, and I quite agree that as the series had gone — up to that point — there had been ample suggestion that JKR *could* indeed have been building up to some variant of such a revelation. Otoh, there were still a host of niggling details which made that particular Adopted!Harry premise a good deal less than fully convincing.

I proposed what I dubbed the “Changeling!Harry” variant:

According to the Changeling!Harry variant, there was no Dark Ritual requiring the dislocation of the infant Riddle from



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his native time line. One of the major stumbling blocks to the original proposal was its dependence on some form of time-line paradox. Instead, my variant threw the burden of original motivation onto that moldy old fig of Trelawney's bloody first Prophecy. Which has since been confirmed as having been Rowling's intention as well. That this Prophecy was ever made at all is what set off the whole sorry business. Or, at any rate, Harry Potter's part in it.

I'll admit that I would have just as soon not resorted to this device, since it was already such a fanon cliché. But, given that this particular issue was sprawling in slatternly *dishabille* all across the whole question of what Voldemort's motivation in killing the Potters was, we ignore it at our peril. And, to be honest, it was the endless speculation and discussion of this element by the fans during the "three-year summer" between the publication of Book 4 and Book 5 rather than the attention drawn to it in canon which built the reference up into the monolith of utter tackiness that it was by then.

Not that it isn't sufficiently tacky at the end of the series, in any case. Because it oh-but-definitely is.

The major departure that the Changeling hypothesis took from the Adopted!Harry source is that the Potters really did have a son that they named Harry, and that the Changeling "substitution" (actually more like a transformation) took place on the night of James and Lily's murders.

In this variant, we could take most of Dumbledore's statements more or less at face value. It was indeed the half-overheard Trelawney Prophecy which set Voldemort on the Potters' trail. The Prophecy strongly implied that the Potters' child (or

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possibly the Longbottoms') might be the appointed one who would prove to be the answer to this particular Riddle. And, in accordance with tradition, every action Voldemort took to evade his fate has only served to bind him more firmly to it.

If he had left it strictly alone, it might not have come to pass at all.



When exploring the implications of the Changeling hypothesis, our first question is: Why on earth did we believe for so long that Voldemort's curse did not materially affect Harry, apart from giving him his scar?

Because it *did* affect him. In fact that curse quite *obviously* affected Harry. It is widely and unblushingly *admitted* to have affected Harry. By the middle of CoS he had even been shown to have a trace memory of the name "Tom Riddle." Which sounded familiar to him even though he knew he had not ever heard it before. He is a Parselmouth — like Riddle — despite there being no stated history of this gift in the Potter family tree and his mother, being Muggle-born, is unlikely to have passed it down to him. In OotP we were even finally told straight out that, now that Voldemort is back on the physical plane, the link between them which we have been seeing glimpses of as far back as PS/SS now goes in both directions.

What *else* did that botched curse do to him?

Is he even the *same* Harry Potter?

Are you sure? Are they? And even if you, or they, are sure, are they *right*?





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Who, after all, really got a chance to observe that infant in the period after the attack, before he was turned over to the Dursleys to raise? And how well did those observers know the Potters' child in the first place?

Pettigrew had (most probably) snatched Voldemort's wand, escaped, and was off making his own plans to go into hiding to his best advantage. He only knew that the infant had survived the attack and had been left howling in the ruins.

Sirius got a quick glimpse of the baby, in the dark of night, in the ruins of the Potter house when he turned up soon afterwards and tried to convince Hagrid to let him take the child.

Lupin was out of the loop altogether. If Lily had close friends of her own we did not yet even know who they were (there does seem to have been a Mary MacDonald for one, no idea what became of her), and the child was not entrusted to any of them.

The Dursleys were aware of the child's existence, but had never seen him. We do not know how closely Dumbledore had been tracking the Potters — who were very young members of the Order — which at that point I still believed had only been formed about the time the Prophecy was made. (Rowling implies not, but has provided us with no viable alternate reason for why Dumbledore would have felt a need to form an Order of his own when the Ministry was already working with him.)

We do know that Hagrid had known the Potters, both as members of the Order and from when they were in still in school, but had he ever seen their son before he was sent to Godric's Hollow to investigate what had happened?

No, we do not know. Everyone saw a dark haired child with

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Lily's green eyes and inquired no further.

Or perhaps not. There is still that "missing" period between the time that the Potters were killed and Harry was left on the Dursleys' doorstep. Much discussion has been generated regarding Harry's probable whereabouts during that period. And I think that if my somewhat facetious suspicions about that time gap are wrong, and possibly even if they aren't, there is still a good chance that for at least part of that time he was under examination at the Department of Mysteries. And we haven't been told their findings.

Some observations in canon (direct and indirect) for us to consider are;

- 1 Voldemort had already undergone a great many voluntary physical and magical changes from his origins as an apparently normal human wizard. By the time he showed up at Godric's Hollow he certainly no longer appeared to be completely human. Or perhaps we ought to say, knowing what we know now, he was no longer a "complete" human.
- 2 Voldemort's attempt to murder the infant Harry Potter established a connection between the two of them. To outside appearances, the result of that murder attempt was that the "Victim" lived while the "Murderer" did not. We have been shown in canon that the connection between them was not broken by Voldemort's apparent death. It remained intact, open, and by OotP was fully active, and went in both directions. Voldemort allegedly later blocked off the connection from his end through the use of Occlumency. Even later than



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that, in DHs Harry unconsciously managed to create an override to Tom's Occlumency, and to reverse the "polarity" of the connection. The actual mechanics of this last event were never satisfactorily explained.

- 3 It was established in PS/SS, and later confirmed in GoF that VaporMort was capable of existing in the stolen bodies of other creatures for limited amounts of time. Even in the unwilling bodies of other creatures that he had taken control over by magical/psychic force. This may or may not be related to his exceedingly well-developed gift for Legilimency, but it definitely appears to be the basis of his talent for possession.
- 4 This particular talent for "taking possession" of others was shared by the Diary Revenant in CoS. Voldemort is also stated as having "possessed" the snake that bit Arthur Weasley despite his having already reincarnated himself into a functioning simulacrum by that time. This, and his last ditch effort to possess Harry and use him as a hostage during the battle of the Atrium at the end of OotP confirms that this was not an ability which was unique to his disembodied state, and that even after he was back in a physical body of his own, this ability had been retained. He was capable, in short, of maintaining a psychic connection with two host bodies at once. We do not know what becomes of the simulacrum while Voldemort is possessing a victim for we were never given that information.
- 5 It appeared to be established in CoS that at least some wizards are capable of creating something on the order



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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 the 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.

- 6 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.
- 7 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.
- 8 It was stated outright in PoA that a wizard's body can live without his 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. Whether this state is shared by individuals capable of projecting their consciousness into a secondary body via possession is unknown.





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Which, at long last, finally brings back us to the Changeling Hypothesis. It has seen a bit of evolution since its inception in 2003, and it no longer marches with canon at all, but, then, by this time full canon-compliance is no longer a requirement for viable theories.

The premise is: Harry, an immature, fully human entity, seems to have been left with no conscious memory of the event that Changed him, beyond that of his mother's screaming and a green light. Voldemort, a mature entity with an already deeply compromised soul, seems to have been left with only a memory of "pain beyond pain." I believe that in Voldemort's case this was only due in part to the destruction of his physical body.

In the original iteration of Changeling hypothesis, my contention was that by the miscalculation of choosing to preserve his life experience, rather than his soul, Voldemort's soul was stripped of *all* its experience by the rebounding curse, and that the memory, self identity, and self-awareness of Lord Voldemort were spun off to exist independently as VaporMort. Essentially this was the "residue" of all his first life.

But that his soul, now stripped of all of its first life's experience and effectively returned to its original state, transmigrated to the nearest living body available to give it shelter, using the connection provided by the curse as its anchor. That, in short, Harry Potter became the repository of Tom Riddle's soul. That Harry was double-souled, and consequently now had all the qualities needed to "vanquish" the residue of Lord Voldemort.

Also that "inheriting" a new identity and growing up as Harry

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Potter constituted Tom Riddle's "second chance."

Clearly, according to canon, this interpretation of the matter is simply, wrong.

But it is not altogether forgotten.



The greater part of the pain of his destruction was due, not to his mere removal from a physical body, but to the forcible dividing of his very soul, stripping it of its life experience, along with all of the immortal, non-human qualities that he had been at such pains to acquire. It was these non-human, non-mortal qualities which survived in disembodied form, controlled and directed by Riddle's conscious memories and "Self" identity. These (predominantly adult) memories retain a tenuous connection to the underlying magical and temperamental qualities of the original human "soul" which had once informed the original, human, Tom Riddle. But they do not control it, and it does not control or support them.

In this sundering, the stripped soul, was left bereft, without a physical housing or any significant residue of the life experience which it had once possessed. The end result was very much as though it had been returned to its original, newborn state.



The imprint of a soul which informs a ghost is able to sustain itself because it retains the self-awareness of its former existence to hold it together and the personality and memories of its former identity to give it shape. If Lord Voldemort's prepa-



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rations had not included a miscalculation, the destruction of his physical body might have resulted in a very powerful and self-aware ghost which could possibly have continued to direct his followers even from a disembodied state and would have needed only to instruct those followers to build, or provide it with a simulacrum in which it might have easily have re-housed itself to facilitate a “return”.

A ghost, however, is incapable of learning anything new. Whether such a re-embodied Lord Voldemort would have shared this limitation is uncertain. (It must be said, however that the one in canon certainly appears to.)

The stripped soul, however, now possessing neither self-awareness nor developed personality to give it form, nor memories to guide it, and which, moreover, was barred from passing through the Veil, could not properly “die.” Nor would it have been capable of sustaining itself on its own. It must find itself a shelter and sanctuary.

This almost entirely reverted (but fully human) psychic entity which, for convenience sake, we will regard as the “soul” of Tom Riddle, complete with all of the fundamental magical and temperamental qualities with which he had been born, but without conscious memory of or emotional connection to its former life, ripped from the no longer altogether human body and stripped of its non-human and non-mortal acquired qualities, instinctively used the only connection accessible to it, the connection established by the curse just cast, transmigrating into the nearest living human body available to it, where it melded with the soul of the original infant Harry Potter, who it would appear was a compatible temperamental and magical

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“match,” even if not identical in every respect. It was probably this compatibility that had prompted the Prophecy demons to toss out a Prophecy linking them in the first place.

— Thus creating a composite but fully human hybrid entity which now possessed the inherent qualities necessary to destroy the still conscious and potentially animate “residue” of Lord Voldemort, in accordance with the Trelawney prophecy.



Well, that was the original hypothesis. Obviously, this no longer plays. But, let's follow this line of inquiry beyond its dead end and see what develops further:

Both souls are now harmoniously contained within one physical body, that of the young Harry Potter who has no conscious memory of this point of joining. The Harry Potter that we know has developed as a fully human, but composite, hybrid entity. Further, given that the Tom Riddle entity had been reverted to a newborn state, and Harry Potter has already grown and developed to the age of some 15 months, it is safe to state that the dominant personality, if any, is most likely to be that of Harry Potter.

An example of the actual process might be comparable to that of a botanist's grafting of an experimental hybrid onto a closely related, but more hardy, root stock. [Note: all infants begin with an inherent temperament. The individual's actual character develops later. The Tom/Harry hybrid's “character” has since developed as an integrated corporate entity.] It is tempting to wonder whether this sort of a grafting would have “taken” at all with Neville Longbottom.



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The composite entity which we know as Harry Potter, however, unlike the former Tom Riddle, retains the original Harry Potter's deeply internalized experience of 15 months as a loved and wanted child, with all of the emotional strength and normal early development that this entails. Consequently the infusion of the original Tom Riddle's underlying temperament — which had not yet developed the sociopathic pathologies of even a slightly older Riddle — and Riddle's magical qualities served only to enhance rather than to divide or undermine the Potter child's very similar fundamental temperamental qualities and potential character.

The present Lord Voldemort, consequently, does not have possession of his own soul. He bound it securely, prevented it from passing through the Veil at his first "death," and, not regarding it as being of any value, effectively threw it away. Whereupon it passed into the keeping of Harry Potter.

Who was — until that point — deeply loved. And knew it.



Unfortunately, from the night that Tom Riddle's soul passed into the keeping of Harry Potter, Harry became as unloved as Riddle had always been. Harry, however, at 15 months of age had already learned that vital first lesson of bonding with those who tended him. And he had learned it very well.

For Harry, the abrupt transition from his parents' loving care into the grudging hands of his Aunt Petunia ought to have struck him as a profound betrayal and loss, one that could have fully justified a descent into grief, fury, and crushing despair. We are given no indication that anything like this ever hap-

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pened. Something therefore sustained Harry through this dreadful "passage."

To the soul of Tom Riddle life in Petunia Dursley's keeping would have seemed nothing out of the ordinary. It is not impossible that to Harry the vague "presence" of that second soul which took these changes of circumstance in stride, with neither terror nor feelings of betrayal might have served as a stabilizing, if somewhat dampening influence.

In return, as nature abhors a vacuum, to the Riddle soul, which had been stripped of all memories of its own former life and any true sense of "self," Harry's sharp memories of warmth, love and joy in his parents' care might well have served as an anchoring point enabling its emptiness to assimilate something of the outlook of an emotionally healthy infant who has successfully taken the first steps toward normal human interaction. These memories would certainly have given that soul a clear impression of an emotional landscape which was true, appropriate, and desirable that would have enabled it to establish a functional template of how things "ought" to be, and against which its established patterns of reaction to a landscape, such as the present one, of cold necessity and grim endurance would have finally become identifiable as something else altogether.

In short, it was a true symbiosis of mutual benefit to both parties, and it served them well over the following 10 years, throughout which the two souls became ever more closely entangled, sharing the single identity of Harry Potter. And neither could have told you which was the original, nor where one left off and the other began. In fact they were ultimately no longer even aware that they were two, and not one.



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But as to the central issue; that of the Changeling Hypothesis, Albus does drop hints. Even the fact that — in canon — he was able to state with confidence from the outset that Voldemort was not dead is a strong suggestion that he knew perfectly well that there was at least one Horcrux in the equation by 1981. Canon does not apply here, but the list of means that a wizard can use to ensure a degree of immortality has got to be even shorter than the list of what monsters are stone-turners.

And, indeed, in the original iteration of this hypothesis, Harry is still technically a Horcrux. But this time, he is the *only* Horcrux.

That Dumbledore was aware of *something* of what had taken place at Godric's Hollow is suggested by his description, back as early as the first book in the series, of the late Professor Quirrell "sharing his soul with Lord Voldemort." And Harry's descriptions of what he had experienced through that scar, even in his first year, must have made Albus suspicious of the nature of that scar. For that matter, we even get every indication that Dumbledore was already suspicious of the nature of that scar as early as the opening chapter of PS/SS.

Harry Potter retains the deeply internalized experience of 15 months as a loved and wanted child, which by the time of Riddle's attack upon him had already established a very different, and much more integrated and resilient sense of "Self" than that which the young Riddle had developed under the institutional-style of care of the orphanage in which he was raised. (Leaving completely aside the possibility of outside tampering and interference by 3rd-parties.)



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Consequently the infusion of a bit of Tom Riddle's magical qualities served only to enhance the abilities of, rather than to divide or undermine the Potter child's fundamental temperamental qualities and potential character

That an individual's soul is the seat of their feelings explains Harry's residual connection to Voldemort's emotional state. As well as the fact that — even once Harry was aware of it — Voldemort could still manage to waltz in and out of Harry's head undetected, as he did off and on throughout the whole of Year 5. It would appear that Harry must share a similar underlying temperament to Tom Riddle's original source "template" (without sharing Riddle's sociopathic personality disorder). This similarity may have contributed to Harry's initial confusion as to which of the emotions he was experiencing were not really his.

And it should be remembered that Harry only definitely identified those feelings which leaked through to him over the connection at long distance while Voldemort was otherwise occupied, as not being his own. When Voldemort's consciousness was also present, Harry was unable to distinguish between his own feelings and those of his "passenger."

This hybridization may also explain Harry's resistance to Voldemort's magic, since he is using some of what was once Voldemort's own power to resist him. But I had begun to suspect that this issue could be more related to the notorious "gleam" of triumph in Dumbledore's eye when Harry described Voldemort having used his blood to create the simulacrum.

I have always believed that Voldemort introduced a paradox into the equation when he chose to use Harry Potter's blood to build that simulacrum. And that it was one which had prob-





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ably not worked to his advantage. The protection which Lily Potter placed upon Harry was established at the cost of her life's blood. (Metaphorically, that is. She was killed by a curse. The curse did not literally shed her blood.) Her blood, which is to say Harry's blood relationship to her, protected him from his enemy. In whatever form in which that enemy might personally attempt to attack Harry, his enemy could not touch him.

Voldemort's use of Harry's blood to create his simulacrum did indeed serve to reduce, although not eliminate that particular prohibition. But I think that perhaps the blood tie did NOT serve to work around the protection that Albus had layered on top of Lily's, which was based upon it, and for which Albus might well think he had reason to feel a flash of triumph. Protection in which Harry is protected from Lord Voldemort so long as he is in the company of his blood relations, and can call the home of Lily's blood relations his own. This protection would run out upon his attaining his majority, but it would continue to protect him until then.

Lord Voldemort's new simulacrum, however, *also* bears a close blood relationship to Harry Potter — as he had fully intended. Consequently, it *also* bears a close blood relationship to Lily. The simulacrum, therefore, is now one of Harry's "blood relatives." Until Harry attained his majority Lord Voldemort now could not kill him.

The arm-wrestling match with the brother wands in the Little Hangleton graveyard ultimately went in Harry's favor, since it was effectively two against one. (And it turned out that we hadn't heard the last of that, either. Although the end result was exceedingly poorly and inadequately explained.) In

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GoF, none of Voldemort's AKs connected; even though Harry was already injured, and had a game leg, he managed to dodge all of them. The echoes from the Priori Incantatum gave Harry advice and assistance enabling him to escape. A great golden statue intervened when Voldemort attempted to kill him in the Atrium in OotP, and when Voldemort attempted to take possession of him he ran into something that he absolutely did *not* expect, and barely escaped without being captured, himself.

Harry might as well have been given a two-year's dose of Felix Felicis where Tom Riddle was concerned. Until he turned 17 and shook the dust from the Dursley's home from his feet, Voldemort simply could not kill him.

But Voldemort could still *hurt* him. Terribly. That gleam of triumph did not last long.

And the possibility that Harry might be able to shed the unintentional Horcrux without having to die himself, was not proven.



With Harry Potter's return to the wizarding world, however, it became almost immediately evident that there were serious disadvantages to the incorporation of two separate entities into one. When in proximity with the still active psychic "residue" of the Riddle soul's former additional components it became vulnerable to the original entity's emotional pull, producing physical pain and resulting in erratic episodes of psychic "leakage." These exchanges continued to plague Harry Potter since that date and now that the original identity has managed to reincarnate itself into a functioning simulacrum, the connec-



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tion appears to run in both directions. In addition, Harry's ingrained reluctance to involve or to depend upon others which he owes in part to the coping patterns of the Riddle soul has reached the point of being as much a hindrance as a help.

The "double wills" may not invariably operate in concert either. In fact, in Phoenix we were given at least two, and possibly more occasions where Harry effectively heard himself telling people information that he had not intended to reveal, or casting spells without consciously choosing to do it. It is heartening to reflect that on most of these occasions this turned out to be the very best thing he could have done under the circumstances. Although whether this influence was due to the "Tom" fragment, or a harbinger of the sort of warping of the universe around Harry Potter that so marred the course of DHs, we cannot be sure, for although Voldemort was able to see and hear what Harry saw and heard, and to sense Harry's emotions, if the connection worked for him the way it worked for Harry at that point, Voldemort had no actual access to Harry Potter's thoughts.



And, finally, I thought that this reading might also explain something of the 2-dimensional, "cartoon" character of the restored Lord Voldemort. For all that he had managed to create a living replica of his previous body, his entire "Self," already severely compromised by the underlying sociopathic personality disorder, did not inhabit that body. He was quite literally a "fragmented" personality. What we were observing was very much akin to an embodied memory without a human heart. It's



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reasoning displays a consistent lack of connection with human experience or responses and its emotions are simple and rather crude reactions to an intellectual reading of the situation, rather than authentic emotional responses. They are memories of emotions, distorted and erratic. That he was lacking any authentic emotional connections in his speech or actions could also explain the hollowness of his performances which reflected nothing of the charisma and power that they must once have displayed in order to enthrall most of his schoolmates and his instructors. The current Lord Voldemort was quite literally "not all there."

But still powerful.

And still exceedingly dangerous.

And much trickier to get rid of than an enemy that one could simply kill.



In 2003, at the end of the original Changeling hypothesis essay I listed the three steps that would seem to need to be taken in order for Harry to permanently rid the world of Lord Voldemort as:

He has to destroy the simulacrum which Voldemort caused to be created at the end of GoF.

He has to destroy the "evil memory" which controls and drives the simulacrum. Essentially he must eliminate the "Lord Voldemort" entity (or VaporMort, as it was presented at the beginning of the series).

And, finally, he must release Tom Riddle's own soul and send it through the Veil.





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Not necessarily in that order.

And although, over the course of the series to that date we had been given a couple of simple solutions (simple, but not easy) which might accomplish the first two list items above, we were still left asking how on earth is Harry supposed to release a soul which the Changeling hypothesis contended is so fully entangled with his own that it has become a part of himself?

In fact, to be safe, in canon, after HBP had been added to the equation, I thought he should probably neutralize that particular “evil memory” of his enemy before he destroyed the simulacrum. For with the probability of having a Horcrux (i.e., the Harrycrux) still being in play at the final confrontation, we could no longer safely assume that destroying the simulacrum would at the worst case merely revert Voldemort to VaporMort.

It now seemed entirely possible that to destroy his current hosting body now will merely launch Voldemort into a battle to posses Harry’s, despite the pain to both of them which that would invoke.

But, however difficult it might be, Harry must release Tom Riddle’s soul, and send it beyond the Veil.

For, as long as Harry Potter is carrying around any part of Tom Riddle’s soul, he can never truly be free of the persistent, recurring memory of Voldemort. The “Master” Horcrux simply cannot be destroyed as long as the Harrycrux continues to anchor it this side of the Veil. Voldemort would continue to live as long as Harry does.



Returning to the original Changeling hypothesis; on Volde-

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mort’s end it also seems clear that he must personally destroy Harry Potter if he is ever to be able to function again as a “complete” entity. If anyone else should manage to kill the boy, the human soul that was once Tom Riddle’s is so entangled with that of Harry Potter that it might, despite his measures to attain immortality, be carried through the Veil with it and permanently lost.

However, it is also clear to the reader that Voldemort is not aware that he does not have possession of his own soul. Nor does he realize that if he does succeed in murdering Harry and recovering it, he will be recovering a soul that understands itself to be Harry Potter.

This can hardly work to Lord Voldemort’s advantage. His soul has undergone considerable transformation since it was last in his keeping. For the past 15 years it has been living the life of Harry Potter. Harry’s reality, perceptions and objectives are by now far more “real” to it than those of the former Tom Riddle — which it does not truly remember. And, having incorporated the infant Potter’s memories, it knows what love is, now; even though it has personally experienced little of it. It accepts the existence of love as an act of faith, and it is no longer the soul of a sociopath.

I am no theologian. I do not go searching for Christ figures in children’s’ (or anyone else’s) literature. But it looked an awful lot to me, as well as to much of the fandom, that Rowling may have handed us one after all. She certainly seemed determined to strike poses in public which implied that she had.

And at this point in the story that figure is not Harry Potter. To that point in the story arc Harry is standing squarely in the



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position of the soul in need of salvation. Which, in accordance with all conventional Christian doctrine, has already been provided, and now must be embraced.

And, in a very real sense, so is Tom Riddle.



An infant simply does not consciously *choose* whether or not to bond with its caretakers. It just *does* so. It never occurs to him *not* to. This is the first step of all human interactions and it is virtually a biological imperative. It simply happens — unless that infant is somehow prevented from taking that crucial step.

Clearly if what Rowling tells us is literally true, there had to have been something in Tom Riddle's earliest experience which prevented him from ever having the faith necessary to form a connection with the people who were responsible for his welfare. This took place at so early an age that it is not something he can justly be held to be responsible for *choosing*.

But, having been denied the experience of forming any human connection, at the point that it was essential to his future development to do so, he became incapable of ever living what anyone could call a "normal" human life. Tom Riddle must answer for his own actions, certainly. But it sounds as if he was set loose into the world unequipped to make proper choices. If the soul is the seat of the emotions, then he was emotionally crippled well before reaching an age of accountability.

So is it really an *appropriate* example of Divine Justice to destroy this soul for the virtually inevitable results of developing a defect over which it had no choice? A defect so fundamental as to render him incapable of comprehending the true

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meaning or purpose of any social contract? Is the damage to such a soul irreparable? Is there no possibility of healing?

The only thing that could conceivably have saved Tom Riddle would have been to get him out of that environment and into one where he could learn that basic first step of human relationships, to "bond" with his caretakers, before it was too late.

That did not happen. In his first life Tom Riddle never learned to love another creature. And if no one ever loved the infant Tom Riddle it was not because he didn't deserve it.

Under the reasoning of the original Changeling Hypothesis, The life of Harry Potter has constituted Tom Riddle's "second chance." The now-incorporated essay originally entitled 'The Premature Prediction' explored a proposal of a "spirit quest" which I thought might conceivably contain some component of the climax of the final book in the series.

Originally this quest was proposed as something on the order of the following:



Harry finally confronts Voldemort in the Department of Mysteries. The trio has decided that they must get the Locked door open. In the confrontation they are pursued into room of the Veil. Voldemort behaves in his characteristic taunt-then-attack mode. Harry defends himself and somehow manages to destroy the simulacrum.

And, as in the Battle of the Atrium, he immediately finds himself pitched into a struggle with Lord Voldemort for the possession of his own body.

He throws himself into the Archway in order to take his



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enemy down with him, and to make his death *count* for something. Thus embarking on that spirit quest. If Rowling decided to use Harry's prior performance with Pensieves as foreshadowing, he will not fall all the way through the Archway and his friends will be able to pull him physically back through the Veil itself. He will be deeply comatose, but not actually dead. His friends, however, are unable to wake him.

And they do not know whether it will be Harry who wakes, or Voldemort.



Beyond the Veil, Sirius Black, either as man or dog is waiting for him and serves as his guide. In the spirit realm the Voldemort entity exists independently — probably in VaporMort form. It finds itself unable to retreat back through the Veil to the physical world.

Enraged, it tracks Harry's progress and settles in to hunt him.

Harry will certainly meet his father on this quest. James will be of some assistance, and may be able to give Harry needed information, but he will not be able to rid Harry of the VaporMort entity which is hunting him. James will send them in search of Lily, who after all *did* manage to defeat Voldemort the first time.

As Harry and Sirius travel on, Harry will eventually have to start questioning how and why Voldemort is still hunting him when both of them are \*dead\* Harry may encounter others who have died in the war by that time, (Dumbledore? Pettigrew? Quirrell — who might thank him for delivering him from bondage?) but this part of the sequence will not be drawn out unduly.



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Ultimately they will make their way to Lily and Harry will at long last have to face up to, and fully understand, and finally accept — instead of just take for granted — the love that saved him. And has *gone on* saving him. And will *continue* to go on saving him.

And at that point Voldemort will make yet another attempt to overpower him.

During this final attack, Lily's "sacrifice" will engage, confrontation will become transformation, the two souls will finally become disentangled and Tom Riddle, who by this time has grown into a variant aspect of Harry Potter will utterly repudiate the false Lord Voldemort, banishing him forever.

And will then beg mercy and forgiveness from Lily who ultimately has saved him as well as Harry. If Rowling decides to play the reincarnation card (highly unlikely, I know) Lily may well turn out to have been Tom's own mother in a previous lifetime.

Elements of this rough template are actually from a work by C. S. Lewis. But they aren't from any of the Narnia books, they are from Lewis's last adult novel, "'TIL WE HAVE FACES'.

At the end of this resolution, overwhelmed by the power of the transformation, disoriented by the separation from his "other soul," and blinded by the light that surrounds him, Harry stumbles through a door into a mercifully dim hallway.

It was only locked from the other side. (And those rooms in the DoM are a right warren, all running into one another behind the scenes.)

...Thereby bringing with him/releasing The Power to permanently rid the Potterverse of the Dementors. Which it does, quite handily.





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If Harry's body was recovered from the Veil, he now wakes.

Tom Riddle remains behind in the spirit realm, perhaps in hope of a more appropriate resurrection one day. And so does Sirius Black, who would also rather take the chance of a whole new life someday than to attempt to return to the one which he made such a monumental botch of. Particularly given that any friends of his still among the living have all moved on without him. If Rowling decides to play the obvious parallel card it will be discovered that Harry's quest has taken exactly three days and three nights.

The rest of the ending was pretty much as stated in the remaining essays posted elsewhere in the collection.



Well, that was more or less the original theory, lightly modified to reflect the end of OotP. Back when I still took Rowling's apparent hint that there was due to be some sort of a Christian theme to the resolution of the adventure at face value.

Unfortunately, imho, it turns out that Ms Rowling seems unable to draw a distinction between Christian symbolism and Christian content. Admittedly, she is hardly alone at that.

On the strength of having had the whole later half of my theory shot out from under me only three months after I first posted it I was still a little miffed to see it go. But as I say in the intro, I had never expected for it to turn out to have been altogether correct, in any case.



However, my own tendency to look for patterns then had

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me wondering whether — if the “Lord Voldemort” that we were now forced to consider is, in fact, not much more than an embodied evil memory — we might have already been shown an appropriate means to neutralize and disarm him, buying us time to figure out how to deal with that 6th Horcrux.

*A lá Gilderoy Lockhart, perhaps?*

*Obliviate, anyone?*





## Regarding the Potterverse Part III

# Concerning Endgame

Considerations made while waiting for the final book.

The first of these pieces is no longer online. It has probably outlived its usefulness. After all, I seriously doubt that any remaining fan is going to be looking to chess references in hopes of a hint of where the story arc may be heading.

Still, it has been a part of the collection long enough to be worth archiving.



## Endgame: Definition

**E**ndgame.

A chess reference.

Well is it?

Does the adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord read as a viable chess analogy?

By the end of HBP I didn't see a lot of evidence for it. As pervading as the association with chess might have seemed over the course of the 3-Year summer, as the series progressed, we even appeared to even be getting less and less attention drawn to games of wizard's chess being played in the background.

And yet, by the end of HBP we'd also all realized that once something occurs in this series, it seemed to be exponentially more likely to recur than not. And we had been given a *major* chess moment back in year 1. (Which, in retrospect, I think was no more than an indication that Rowling had fallen in love with the idea of the live chess game in PS/SS, and in order to have it, one of the kids had to be good at chess. At that point of the series she still had enough restraint not to have her little self-insert Hermione be the one to shepherd the trio *all* the way through the Labyrinth by herself.)

So did I expect another game of live chess in Book 7?

Well, no. I didn't. I thought that we might get some more chess references, and possibly some chess imagery, and we quite possibly could get some overt chess strategy or tactics, but by that point, whatever game it was that we were playing, it didn't really seem to be chess. But, then, *I* do not really play chess, so I might not recognize a parallel even if it is right under my nose.





## Endgame: Definition

Although I did think it might not hurt for us to direct a bit of attention back to the chess game that we did get.

If there was still a chess metaphor in operation, by the end of HBP we could probably put names to some of those captured pieces on the black side (Harry's side). Cedric, probably James and Lily were all pawns. If they had ever even been on the board at all. You can make a good argument for Sirius Black being the "other Knight" whose capture so shocked and frightened the trio and convinced them all of the seriousness of their danger.

The only one of the towering, faceless white opposing pieces whose actions we were ever told about was the Queen, who was all over the board, violent and deadly.

But, to be truthful, I cannot see that a chess metaphor works at all if one attempts to apply it literally, it's far too labored. Nor can I really see any way to viably postulate a separate identity for the "King" and the "Queen," in the progress of this series to that date. Even if you identify the Queen as the traditional figure of the "Vizier" given the shortage of active female characters, and the subordinate positions of the ones we do have. I could only conflate the King and Queen into "Ruler," whereupon we would no longer be dealing with chess.

And, if that was the case, with Dumbledore's removal from the board you would expect the game to be over — which it clearly was not.

Unless, of course, Dumbledore was not the Ruler, but the player. In which case, what was he doing on the board in the first place? (ETA: one is still inclined to ask this question.)



## Endgame: Definition

The endgame of a chess match is defined as the final phase of the game, when there are few pieces left on the board. Some define this as the part of the game when the King comes out and fights. For others the main objective of this phase is to promote your pawns. It's real purpose, of course, is to narrow the focus and bend all of your attention to capturing the enemy King. So, yes, by the opening page of Deathly Hallows we had certainly entered the endgame of the series. But from where I was standing the game was not looking anything like chess.

Besides, it is only a pawn that survives to the 8th square which gets transfigured into a Ruler. And Harry did not really seem to be a pawn, even if he acted every bit as passively as one. Rowling's determination that the reader should see Harry as being "special in every way" got far too much in the way of that.

I also didn't think that what happened back in the live chess game in the Labyrinth was intended as a serious prediction or a reflection for what would eventually happen in the "endgame" of the series, either. Nor was it. We should probably have all been vigorously trying to divest ourselves of any underlying expectations we might be harboring that were based upon that.

Back in the Labyrinth, HRH stepped into the positions of three of the pieces in McGonagall's game of living chess. Named pieces, each with set roles. None of them were pawns.

They also played the black side. We have to ignore the usual symbolism of our cultural associations regarding black vs. white here. This is chess. In chess it is the white side that always initiates the conflict. The kids were the defenders.

I think that the relevant metaphor here, if any, does not concern the trio's "fates" so much as the assigned roles by which they





## Endgame: Definition

brought the conclusion about. Which is to say, their methods.

And just what were those methods?

Hermione = Rook. One of the “major” pieces. After the Queen, the most versatile, and visibly powerful piece on the board. It can travel any number of squares in one move, occupy light or dark squares, shift forward, back, or sideways in either direction. But it is constrained to move in only one direction per move and to move only in a straight line, to follow the grid, to cross from one square to the next across the straight lines. A Rook may move up or down rank or file, but only one or the other in any move. This is a piece with considerable power but little subtlety. You always see it coming.

If we have to put a face on the “other Rook,” that face could well be Hagrid’s. He was expected to have some part yet to play. (ETA: As if. Rowling kept him around purely to play “Potter’s porter,” carrying his supposedly lifeless body out of the forest, weeping. Much as he had carried Albus’s body out of the castle, weeping, at the end of the previous book.)

I might have said that the other Rook was Minerva herself, but this whole “challenge” was hers. She was the player of that game, not one of the pieces. And she was playing the other side; the opposition. Indeed, if Minerva was a piece on that board, she was the terrifying white Queen! (Which is about as close as you are going to get to the Ever-So-Evil!Minerva of various fanon theories, here.)

Ron = Knight. A “minor” piece. The piece that leaps around corners. The Knight’s move appears erratic, impulsive and unpredictable, and you don’t always see it coming. It is the only piece that can leap over other pieces with impunity; but for all

## Endgame: Definition

of its apparent eccentricity it is tightly constrained by its traditions. Two squares forward or back, plus one over, in either direction, or, two squares over to either side and one square forward or back. From the Knight’s starting point there is a maximum of only 8 squares that it can land, the path to each as crooked as a spider’s leg.

Harry = Bishop. The other “minor” piece. The piece that always starts the game positioned closest to a Ruler. Able to travel an unlimited number of squares in every move. Constrained always to follow an oblique path crossing squares only at the corners. This is the piece that “walks through walls.” Easily overlooked. The Bishop is further constrained to travel forever only on the same color of square from which it begins the game. Each side has both a “white Bishop” and a “black Bishop.” Between them they cover the whole board.

If Harry was Albus’s “white Bishop” (“No Unforgivable Curses from you, Potter!”\*\*) I don’t think that we need to ask who was his black one.

(\*\*ETA: and don’t we all wish that Rowling had kept to that premise, instead of going out of her way to demonstrate that the “Unforgivables” are anything but, and only unforgivable depending upon who is casting them?)



And so long as we are directing our attention to chess, it is far from impossible to reflect that we may have been dealing with various bits of chess metaphor in the series all along. Which we, from our position in the middle of the board have not been able to recognize, and that Rowling has not chosen to call to our attention.



## Endgame: Definition

It's a bit of a stretch. But it's possible. I won't labor the issue here, but I will direct you to the Wikipedia site if you want to go and explore the options.

But the basics are:

In chess; strategy refers to the overall, long range plans for the game.

Tactics are the plans and sets of moves designed to gain the advantage in the short term.

The Wikipedia entry on "tactics" reads:

In chess, a tactic refers to a short sequence of moves which limits the opponent's options and which results in tangible gain. Tactics are usually contrasted to strategy, in which advantages take longer to be realized, and the opponent is less constrained in responding

A single chess move considered in isolation is below the level of tactics. To take an enemy piece or deliver check may be useful, but unless it is part of a plan, a (single) move is usually not classified as a tactic.

The fundamental building blocks of tactics are two-move sequences in which the first move poses a double threat. The opponent is unable to respond to both threats in one move, so the first player realizes an advantage on the second move. This class of tactic includes forks, skewers, discovered attacks, undermining, overloading, and interference. Pins also fall into this category to some extent, although it is common for a defending player to relieve neither of the two threats posed by a pin, in which case the attacking player commonly maintains the pin for a longer period of time. A pin is therefore sometimes more strategic than tactical.

Often tactics of several types are conjoined in a combination. A combination, while still constraining the opponent's responses,

## Endgame: Definition

takes several moves to obtain advantage, and thus is considered deeper and more spectacular than the basic tactics listed above.

The concept of *zwischenzug* is often listed as a tactic, but might properly be called a counter-tactic instead. During the execution of a tactic one focuses on only a few pieces as relevant, but a *zwischenzug* complicates the situation by making a more urgent threat with another piece. The effect of a *zwischenzug* is to change the status quo before a tactic can come to fruition. The near ubiquity of the *zwischenzug* makes long combinations all the more rare and impressive.

Chess instructors usually steer beginners away from any detailed study of openings, focusing instead on tactics and endgames, which serve as the basis for later strategic understanding. One should not suppose, however, that one's understanding of tactics is ever completed. It is not the case that all master players know everything there is to know about tactics, and differ only in depth of strategic understanding. On the contrary, as Garry Kasparov famously asserted, a grandmaster (GM) can often tactically overwhelm a mere international master (IM)

Chess computers are considered superhuman at tactics and rather weak at strategy. The fact that computers can play on a par with the best humans suggests that chess is primarily a tactical game. On the other hand, it must be noted that computers don't think about tactics in human terms (fork, skewer, etc.); the nuances of human understanding of chess, both tactical and strategic, have not been imitated by computers, only matched in effective playing strength.





## Endgame: Definition

Links to some of Chess terms which might have been of interest, had a lot of the fans' theories worked out.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fork\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fork_%28chess%29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skewer\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skewer_%28chess%29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovered\\_attack](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovered_attack)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pin\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pin_%28chess%29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Undermining\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Undermining_%28chess%29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overloading\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overloading_%28chess%29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interference\\_%28chess%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interference_%28chess%29)



## Endgame: Expectations

*"Chess computers are considered superhuman at tactics and rather weak at strategy. The fact that computers can play on a par with the best humans suggests that chess is primarily a tactical game. On the other hand, it must be noted that computers don't think about tactics in human terms (fork, skewer, etc.); the nuances of human understanding of chess, both tactical and strategic, have not been imitated by computers, only matched in effective playing strength."*

This was originally all one horrendously long article. But I had to split it years ago and it has been in its current divisions ever since.

I decided to leave this essay and the one on possibilities mostly untouched. This section of the original (much longer) essay, and the following one, were the points at which I had finally settled down to explore probabilities and try to make predictions concerning the 7th book. That being the case, I think my original extrapolations ought to probably stand pretty much as written. I do turn out to have been wrong in rather a lot of my expectations, but I continue to think that at the end of HBP those expectations were not unreasonable.

And besides, I'm rather pleased over the parts that I did get mostly right.



So let's fire up the wayback machine and set it to late May–early June 2007, shall we?

### Item 1: Dead is Dead

We had all arrived at the end of an era. The final action of the adventure would take place off Albus Dumbledore's watch. At least officially.



## Endgame: Expectations

I had belatedly jumped onto the bandwagon that held that Dumbledore *wasn't* dead just before the Spring update of the collection in 2006. So, along with a good many other fans, I found myself sprawled in the road with the wind knocked out of me after Rowling summarily up-ended that conclusion in August of that year.

Having adopted it so late, I hadn't a great deal invested in it, but it entailed revisions to a number of the articles in the collection, and a fair bit of rethinking things.

However, given the way that Rowling set up her world, striking a pose and declaiming that "dead is dead" really looks a lot more like another bit of slight-of-hand on her part than any sort of definitive guideline. For the plain truth of the matter is that, in the Potterverse, dead is NOT necessarily dead. Not in any sense that we would recognize. Not if you set up a universe which allows for the active presence and participation of *ghosts*. (ETA: not to mention Resurrection Stone revenants, or wand "echoes," let alone sentient portraits.)

So for all that Dumbledore was dead, I found it very hard to believe that he was gone. I really did think he would linger on, in some iteration, to the last page and depart peacefully after the crisis was resolved.

But we wouldn't necessarily see him before that. After all. If Albus decided to stick around and haunt somebody, it would hardly be Harry, would it?



### Item 2: An Agenda for Book 7

A MAJOR issue that I thought was going to occupy much of

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the emotional payoff of Book 7 involved the fallout attendant upon Harry finally discovering, or figuring out, what was really going on concerning the death of Albus Dumbledore.

In which, he seems to have completely forgotten that he *also* took an active hand. On Dumbledore's orders.

Because I was convinced that things were simply not as they appeared related to that death, even if Albus was dead. And, after my last round of dodging toppling dominoes, I thought that Rowling was saving it all up for the grand finale.

(ETA: Oh, if only, if only. The little coward of an author dodged the whole issue, because it would have taken too much effort to actually resolve it, and her precious Harry might have had to admit that he was wrong about something!)

...

Rowling had been dropping anvil-sized hints for the past few years that there were some real horrors in store for Harry Potter. Claiming that she would not want to be him, since she knows what is going to happen to him.

I really did not think she was tossing out red herrings in those statements.

(ETA: In retrospect it seems apparent that she was. Up to his suicide march into the Forbidden Forest I cannot see that anything much happened to Harry in DHs that was significantly worse than what had happened to him in one or other of the previous books. Unless Rowling regards the prospect of a winter camping trip — even with all the available magical "mod-cons" as being even more appalling than I do.)

The fans, of course, had taken these statements and run



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with them, proposing all sorts of gaudy, but ultimately rather unimaginative scenarios involving Cruciatus, or disfigurement, or of having to see more people that matter to him die.

I could not honestly say that none of these things would happen in Book 7. There was a better than average chance that Harry would catch another round of Cruciatus over the course of book 7. And a much better than average chance that he would have to see someone else (apart from Lord Voldemort) die in it.

But I really didn't think those were the horrors that Rowling had in mind.

And I suspected that Albus's death was intimately connected with the ones she did mean.

And an examination of Albus's past life, and past actions, might be even more to the point.

(ETA: the more fool I. Not to say that Albus's — totally irrelevant — past life and actions *weren't* being forced down our throats just about every 2nd chapter.)

....

But, when you stopped and thought about it, there was sure one hell of an agenda that still needed to be met in the final book of this series. Because by that time there had been so many questions and issues raised that merely to hunt down the Horcruxes, bring Lord Voldemort to bay, and to destroy him would probably leave the reader curiously unsatisfied. (ETA: called that one right, anyway!) I wouldn't have been astonished to find that Book 7 turned out to be the longest book in the series, after all.

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But, for example, I really thought that:

We all needed to know what was going on with Albus's death. At least to the point of knowing whether Albus had deliberately chosen to die at that time in that manner.

We needed to know why he trusted Snape.

We needed to know just what part in the overall story arc Snape had played.

We also wanted to know about that triumphant gleam Harry thought he saw in Albus's eye when he first told Albus about Voldemort using his blood to create the simulacrum. Acto Rowling that gleam was still "significant."



### Item 3: The Mysterious "Gleam"

By that time in the series I had been wondering if that gleam might be related to the way that Voldemort attempted to possess Harry during the battle of the Atrium and couldn't. Or not without agonizing pain to both of them. He certainly didn't expect that, and it certainly wasn't anything he had planned.

And it was also pretty damned odd when you stopped to think about it.

Harry and Voldemort had spent the whole of year 5 flitting in and out of each other's heads without sustaining anything more than some degree of confusion over whose emotions were whose. What is more, there were a few occasions over the year when it read as if Harry was responding to something other than his own conscious prompting. Admittedly, it was difficult to believe that these occasions were prompted by Tom, since they were universally to Harry's benefit, but nothing related



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to any of this was causing Harry any more appreciable physical pain than being in Voldemort's presence ever had, and it isn't likely that Voldemort was feeling negative effects from the connection either. (ETA: I suppose these odd little sequences were supposed to be foreshadowing of DHs! Harry's "hero's instinct" where he kept repeatedly falling backwards into the correct solution by authorial fiat. Wasn't convincing.)

But as soon as Voldemort attempted to psychically and physically possess Harry — as he had possessed Quirrell — the attempt threw them both into agony until Harry managed to heave Voldemort out of his mind with the hope of seeing Sirius again. (Or more probably with the fact that he started welcoming the prospect of death. Voldemort has a horror of death. The combination probably made him desperate enough to summarily abandon the whole attempt.)

Something protected Harry from being vulnerable to possession by Lord Voldemort.

Was this due to the fact that Harry was already harboring one of Tom Riddle's missing soul fragments?

Or was this the effect of their physically sharing blood?

Or was it a combination of the two?

Or something else, unrelated to either?

(ETA: Evidently, you cannot possess someone twice. Or encase "duplicate" bits of your soul in the same housing. So long as the disabled fragment was in place, the rest of Tom couldn't get past it to take Harry over. Or not effectively enough to accomplish anything of value by it. Unless this was just an indication that the Harrycrux was somehow *damaged*.)

....

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Among the minor clankers and awkwardnesses peppered throughout the series, the climax of OotP was particularly confusingly handled. This was probably the price of the authorial decision to tell the story as completely as possible from Harry's PoV.

This was one of the major reasons that I regarded the possibility that Harry would need to die in order to take down his enemy with such profound skepticism. Unless Rowling chose to have the reader follow Harry into death, such a development would require an abrupt switch of PoV right in the middle of the climax. Since she had not established a practice of doing that kind of thing, I doubted that this would be the rabbit that she would suddenly choose to pull out of her hat in the final show-down of the whole series.

Indeed, unless Harry was not present in a scene at all, she had not shifted out of Harry's PoV for any significant amount of time since the broom hexing incident all the way back in PS/SS. If she intended to use this device again, in the final show-down, she ought to have worked up to it. And she hadn't. If Harry is present in any scene, the scene had always been played from his viewpoint. I really didn't see this changing at any point in the future. So, Harry's death seemed unlikely.

Unless she would, in fact, enable the reader to follow Harry into death.

That option was still on the table.

....

In the climax of GoF Harry may not have known all of what was going on, but the only part of the action that he completely missed due to a Voldemort-induced headache was the murder



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of Cedric Diggory. (And it isn't altogether clear why he should have so completely missed it, since it was Pettigrew who did the killing. There was no headache in play when Snape presumably killed Dumbledore.) The reader was still able to get a direct line-of-sight on the rest of those proceedings.

In OotP, however, it seems that for the most significant part of the whole showdown we have to take Dumbledore's word and Dumbledore's interpretation on everything. At face value, too, since Harry was far too incapacitated to be aware of anything but the pain, the statements that Voldemort made through him and his own reasoning processes.

But, what *appears* to have been going on there is that by possessing the boy, Voldemort was trying to get Dumbledore to kill Harry rather than to do it himself.

Why not do it himself? Had he failed at it so often as to have become gun-shy? I'm not sure that really "reads."

And could he really count on Dumbledore not taking the opportunity to destroy his simulacrum ehile he was effectively trapped in the attempt to possess the boy? If the boy did manage to throw him out, he would have been back where he was two years earlier. (Well, yes, I suppose he was well enough aware that Albus probably *wouldn't* do anything of the sort. That might have actually made a *difference* to things.)

But we've only Dumbledore's word for it that the attempt also caused Voldemort agonizing pain. And, while I can't see any reason for Albus to be lying about it, I'm really not so inclined to accept Dumbledore's word for everything unquestioned any more.

From Harry's PoV, it was only the reflection that if he died

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NOW he would see Sirius again that threw Voldemort out of his head and made the pain stop. So was it the attachment to Sirius, or his willing embracing of death that actually repelled Voldemort? We do not know. And if you ask me, neither did Albus.

And, if the attempt at possession hurt so much, why didn't Voldemort withdraw at once, so he would at least have control of his own wand? If he was immobilized with the pain from trying to possess Harry, why didn't Dumbledore or somebody attack the (now undefended) simulacrum? Or was it undefended? Where was Bellatrix in all of this? Was Albus kept busy having to fend her off? For that matter, what happens to the simulacrum when Voldemort is off in someone else's head? Was Dumbledore afraid that if the simulacrum was destroyed Voldemort wouldn't withdraw from Harry at all? Did Voldemort not withdraw from Harry because he was *stuck*? Is this due to Harry and the simulacrum sharing the same blood?

After all; on a computer you cannot replace a folder with a file. Or vice-versa.

Or was the gleam due to Dumbledore's realization that Voldemort had introduced a paradox into the equation. In that by the protection that Albus had layered on top of Lily's — in which so long as Harry was a minor in company with persons related by blood to Lily Potter he was protected from Lord Voldemort by "his mother's blood," and that by using Harry's blood to create his simulacrum Lord Voldemort was now accounted as one of such "blood relations" and, that, consequently, so long as Harry was a minor and in Lord Voldemort's company, Lord Voldemort would be unable to kill him?

And Echo answers us none.



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### Item 4: Book 7 Agenda (continued/revisited)

But, to continue with the shopping list.

At the opening of DHs:

We also still wanted to hear the full story of what went down in the werewolf caper. WHY did Sirius Black set Severus Snape up? And how did he do it?

And what happened afterwards?

(ETA: well, she managed to drop a bombshell on us as to what order the werewolf caper and the hazing incident took place, anyway. But nothing else was revealed related to that incident.)

\*sigh\* And, all right, all right, *did* Severus Snape have a crush on Lily Evans? Or she on him?

And just what part did Peter Pettigrew have to play in the solution? He had to be significant somehow, but how did he relate to the problem of the Horcruxes?

Speaking of which: what the hey is up with the fake one? What purpose did that serve?

And what's with the Dementors? They had to be even more significant than Pettigrew! Particularly if I was right about Book 7 reflecting Book 3.

And where's Malfoy got to? Were we going to have to be dodging him through the last book as well as the Death Eaters?

How long was it going to take the kids to realize that the 6th Horcrux wasn't the snake?

And while we're at it: just how are you supposed to destroy a Horcrux without getting blasted by it? Or DO you just pitch it



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through the Veil?

Speaking of which: are we ever going to be filled in on why Sirius Black "had to" be killed just when he was? That was what Rowling told us.

(ETA: no.)

And that was just for starters.



### Item 5: Considering Harry

Of a rather more deeply thematic importance, however; there is also the question of taking responsibility for one's own actions.

Harry isn't very good at that.

Harry had been allowed to skate through the first 6 books of the series without ever having to take full responsibility for the effects of any of his own actions. There were always other people who had been all too willing to share the responsibility with him, if not to outright take the responsibility for him.

Eventually I was sure that he was going to be unable to dodge that particular bullet. And Albus was no longer around to take that bullet for him. Even Harry realized this by then.

He was also probably going to end up learning a great many of Albus's secrets in the course of the final book. I thought that these were secrets that he was going to need to in order to solve his Dark Lord problem. Some of those wouldn't be welcome secrets.

Including just why Albus trusted Severus Snape.

And that was not likely to be a painless lesson, either.

(I also suspected that Harry may have to decide whether the





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wizarding world was worth saving. But I realized that suspicion was just me being characteristically pessimistic, so it's just as well not to have placed any great dependence on Rowling investing much in it.)

And, of course, we would also get the bonus of a fine, old-fashioned, extended wrap-up at the end of the story to let us all know how everything (and everyone) turned out.

This wrap-up seems to be the famous "last chapter" that Rowling had already claimed to have written more than a decade earlier, as a promise to herself that she would eventually get there. Consequently, it would be the previous couple of hundred pages which would contain the run-up to the climax and the showdown with Lord Voldemort. The wrap-up isn't actually a part of the active story.

(ETA: and, after the fact, don't we all just wish that this had been a "promise to herself" that Rowling had broken. Unfortunately, to Rowling, promises to herself are far more unbreakable than merely tacit promises to the reader.)



### Item 6: Two Unexpected Deaths and a Reprieve

Speaking of which: Rowling set off a little flurry of controversy with statements made in June of 2006 that she was going to have to rewrite this final chapter a bit. One of the characters who she had originally intended to kill off got a reprieve. Two who had been intended to survive hadn't.

And, for all the storm of speculation this statement set running, I rather suspected that "haven't" may really have been the correct term, even at that point in the series. The subject

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chapter was written before she started on the main body of the work of writing the series, and it consequently reflected her master "plan" of over a decade ago. There had been a lot of water under the bridge in the past 10-12 years.

For that matter, there had been a lot of water under the bridge in the previous 7 years. We'd forgotten how quickly the first four books came out.

Bang, bang, bang, bang. Four books in four years. And with the fourth one she hit a snag.

Rowling has stated in interviews since GoF came out that she fell into a major plot hole that opened up in the middle of the story, requiring her to rewrite nearly a third of the book to plug it.

She also tells us that, after turning the ms of GoF in to the publishers, and after taking a year or so off to recoup from a case of incipient burnout, she subjected her master Plan to three months of intensive review to make sure that there were no more such pitfalls lurking for her in the rest of it before starting work on OotP.

I can't answer for anyone else, but in OotP I certainly felt a distinct shift from the books that had preceded it. And, for that matter, HBP appears to have soundly ignored or dismissed just about every new element that was raised over the course of OotP (apart from the laquer cabinet).

So I very much doubted that Rowling had only just made her decision regarding the deaths of those two characters who now wouldn't be making it since she started writing Book 7. Even if those deaths were due to take place in Book 7. I thought those eventual deaths may already have been telegraphed over the



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course of the last two books that we'd already been given. They may have even already taken place. And we may have already watched the person who now did make it through get that reprieve.

(ETA: as to the reprieve, we *had* already seen it. Arthur Weasley was supposed to die of his snakebite in OotP. When it came down to it, however, Rowling evidently felt it would be too difficult to keep playing the pity card over Harry having lost his parents — who he does not even remember — if Ron had so recently lost a father for whom he actually cared.)



### Item 7: The Birthday List

And, upon that issue...

A rather fun speculation which had cropped up since the previous Spring, proposed that since we never saw a birthday notice on Rowling's original website for Albus, or for Sirius (or James, or Lily at that point), because, presumably, they were all dead by now, then, consequently, anyone who had been given a birthday notice on the official website was sure to be alive at the end of the series. That was a cheerful thought, even if it didn't turn out to be an accurate prediction.

An additional escape clause was that some of the persons not on the birthday list were regarded as simply not being significant enough to rate a birthday notice from the author.

For that matter, we can see for ourselves that with the exception of Dobby, who didn't show up until CoS, and Remus Lupin, who didn't make his entrance until PoA, everyone else who is on the birthday list either showed up in person, or was

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mentioned by name in Book 1. Nobody who showed up in the story after Book 3 was on the birthday list. At All. I would certainly like to believe that this was the reason we'd never seen a birthday notice for Luna Lovegood, anyway.

But then we already knew that Luna tends to get left out of things.



### Item 8: Malfoy

Which reminds me:

Draco Malfoy.

Who is on the birthday list.

I never intended to write an essay concerning Draco Malfoy because I had never been able to see that Malfoy really mattered.

At the end of HBP it appeared that I was wrong about that.

But until HBP I thought that I had fair enough reason to dismiss him.

Malfoy, like Snape, was a required character "type" for the series. You cannot have a series of "school stories" without including a Malfoy character. Otherwise it just doesn't play. Malfoy was the strictly local problem. The hero's rival at school.

Ho-hum. This hero's real problems were clearly *not* at school.

And, unlike Snape, Malfoy never seemed to rise above his obligatory role.

Ergo: Malfoy was *booooooring*.

...

You evidently "have to" have the Nasty Teacher character in a series of school stories, as well. But Severus Snape had never



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been content to settle down and be nothing more than the Nasty Teacher of the piece.

As such, from the beginning of the series, he had stood there as gatekeeper to the reader's understanding that there was more going on in this story than what our viewpoint character could see on the surface, or than what was explained to him at the end of each adventure. Snape had never consented to step back and be no more than what Harry had tried to make of him. And by that time it was clear that Rowling at least, agreed with this perception. Snape, whatever else he was, was *not* boring.

And I was mildly surprised to discover that one of the several days attributed to the Feast of Janus is January 9, the very day that Rowling had assigned for Snape's birthday.

Janus, the two-faced god of the Romans, is the patron God of openings, of gateways, the Lord of endings and beginnings, he whose favor must be petitioned for an auspicious start (and end) of all enterprises. I am astonished that the fans have not made more of that information. But they seem by and large to be determined to romanticize the character and have cast their eyes across the Mediterranean, squinting hopefully at the Anubis archetype.

And, downstream of HBP we were handed the fact that Snape was not boring, nor was he irrelevant. It had finally even penetrated the skulls of that brigade of fans who had spent the past 5 years sniffily informing us all that the growing attention paid to Snape was far in excess of the requirements, because he was "only a secondary character" and that the story was all about the kids. That particular faction now had a nice helping of fricassee of crow to put themselves outside of.



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And, for the record: the story was *never* about "the kids"

The story was about *Harry*. Ron and Hermione are *not* Harry.

By that time it ought to have been clear to any attentive reader that there were four "cardinal" characters in this story arc. And those characters were Albus, Tom, Severus, and Harry. *Everyone* else was a secondary character.

Especially Malfoy.

...

But, regarding Malfoy: Malfoy never appeared to have anything like the substance of a Severus Snape, and by the time Umbridge had set up her Inquisitorial Squad he seemed to be careening off into the literary fate worse than death (i.e., total irrelevance).

Well, as I say above, it appeared that I had my own helping of fricassee of crow to scarf down. I had been wrong about that. In OotP we got the "new Ginny" (who, by HBP bears a distressing resemblance to her distant cousin Bellatrix). In HBP we were given the "new Malfoy." And in both cases I had a great deal of trouble not demanding; "Who the hell are you, and where did you come from?" For, imho, as far as writing technique goes, in neither case did Rowling really manage to adequately prepare us for the substitution.

That said; while I still think that the "new Ginny" appeared to have been assembled from items off a checklist, with (in HBP anyway) a perfectly beastly personality transplant pasted on, I did think the new Malfoy was just about sufficiently plausible. And he was certainly an improvement.

It would have been difficult not to be an improvement. Any-





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thing beats boring. About the best you could say in favor of the original model is that a number of his comments were legitimately funny, and he could write verse that scanned.

And, in keeping with most of the frauds and *poseurs* in this series, he ultimately found himself in a position where he was forced to have to do what he had been shooting his mouth off about for yonks, and found he hadn't the stomach for it. Harry and Ron listened to him spouting off about wanting to help the Dark Lord while they were playing at Polyjuice espionage back in Year 2, and in HBP it looked like Malfoy finally got his wish.

And his gradual realization of just what he had gotten himself into showed through in glimmers around the edges of even our solidly Harry-centric viewpoint.

• • • •

And, rather to my surprise, Malfoy, unlike Harry, seemed to actually (rather than just rhetorically) grasp that there was a distinction to be drawn between the priorities of school and those of the outside world. And that if one is forced to choose between them, school is not the one that should be paramount.

His moment of payback on the Hogwarts Express was a squirmingly uncomfortable passage to get through, but any reader of half-way fair mind had to admit that after watching Harry and his friends hexing Malfoy into unconsciousness on that train for two years running without consequences, or even a second thought, Harry had earned that payback, and also to reflect that Malfoy's revenge was far less vindictive than we might have expected it to be (certainly less so than Harry's would have probably been).



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Malfoy, contrary to all expectations, was clearly in the process of "moving on."

It took most of the year for Harry to catch up to him.

Maybe what Malfoy had always needed was to be given a bit of responsibility.

At any rate Malfoy acquitted himself well enough over the year to finally make me agree that, yes, I really did need to take notice of him.

And I was still not convinced that Voldemort had actually inducted him into the Death Eaters. Voldemort's the type to know that he would get better performance out of an untested youngster by the application of the carrot as well as the stick. I think that assassinating Dumbledore and setting up a way for Death Eaters to invade the Castle may have been presented as the "test" of whether he was "worthy" of being accepted as a Death Eater. It was his initiation ordeal. He may not actually have been one of them yet.

For that matter, it was glaringly obvious that Voldemort fully intended to send Lucius the message that his only son was a failure and that He and his followers had done the world a favor by removing him from it. That so-called back-up team was in fact a team of executioners who would have taken out Dumbledore, if it were to prove necessary, yes, but I think their main orders were to kill Malfoy and make it look as if he had failed in his mission. The whole mission was set up to be a double-cross. Only Snape's Unbreakable Vow derailed it. Snape was sworn to protect Malfoy, and Voldemort wasn't quite ready to dispense with Snape yet.

As for the so-called evidence that Malfoy was already a DE:





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Malfoy's twitching away when touched by shopkeeper could reflect no more than a disinclination for being handled by one's "inferiors" and Malfoy may just as easily have taken some item with him that might intimidate Borgin (or inspire his greed) rather than flash around a Dark mark in what was still a public place.

And, for that matter, I was not sure just where Malfoy now fit into the question of the last book in this series. Our nice familiar little series of formula school stories had been abruptly shot out from under us.

I could not shake the feeling that if we saw Malfoy at all in Book 7 it was likely to be only in glimpses. He was not going to suddenly openly join Harry in fighting the Powers of Darkness™ even if he didn't end up murdering anybody. He had managed to smuggle Death Eaters into Hogwarts, after all. He put Madam Rosemerta under Imperius (or kept her under control after someone else did so). The Ministry probably wanted to get hold of him for that. And since the three out of eight Death Eaters who were sent to serve as his back-up team that managed to get away would be able to tell Voldemort that he did not manage to finish off Dumbledore, he might be dodging them too now, all the way to the end of the story.

I thought that possibly his smartest bet would have been to talk his mother into going into hiding and to turn himself in to the Ministry and sit the rest of this conflict out with his father in the safety of Azkaban. Especially now that the Dementors were gone.

But I doubted that any of that would actually happen.



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### Item 9: Dragon Theories

Once the cover illustrations for the last book had been released a fresh new theory escaped which regarded Draco. Probably one of the last before the final book was upon us. I suspect that theory really belonged over in the 'Out on a Limb' collection, but I left it here.

And, for that matter, it wasn't *my* theory, and I couldn't ever quite manage to take it seriously. But it was rather fun to play with. So I did. At least briefly.

It was, of course, based upon the cover design for the US deluxe edition of DHs. A design which made me very cross with Rowling and her apparent conviction that she is above any sort of requirements pertaining to a consistent worldview.

The cover design depicted the trio, in tattered robes all flying through the air, on the back of a dragon.

Excuse me? Riding a dragon? (ETA: that anything like jumping a shark?)

Quite early in the series, in fact, quite early in the fandom, Rowling was at considerable pains to inform us all that; no, Hagrid is wrong, you cannot keep a dragon as a pet. You cannot tame a dragon. They are much too dangerous.

*Hellooo.*

If you cannot tame one, you can hardly train one as a mount. You might reasonably plop one in front of your treasure and use it as a guard animal (the Goblins of Gringotts do) but that isn't exactly training one. That's just exploiting dragon nature.

And, yet, since Mary GrandPre had a very good track record for only illustrating scenes that were actually IN the books (whatever you may think of her interpretations of the characters), clearly





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Rowling had a scene in DHs in which the trio were riding a dragon.

Unless there turned out to be some kind of a trick to it, I was going to be very cross.

....

Of course there could have been some kind of a trick to it.

I doubted that the dragon was under Imperius — which would be perfectly legal. Dragons are not humans, that curse is only unforgivable when used against humans. However, we were given a strong impression that dragons are both highly magical and also highly magic-resistant. I doubted that the kids could manage to get control of one that way.

I even wondered whether one of my own, early, rather frivolous suggestions might turn out to be not so frivolous after all. Dragons, or some breeds of dragons, might possibly speak and understand a form of Parseltongue. Being able to actually communicate with the Beast would be an advantage in getting one's cooperation.

But the two most common theories floating around fandom were either that the dragon was little Norbert all grown up, or that it was in fact, Draco Malfoy.

I found it hard to give a lot of credence to either theory.

For the dragon to turn out to be Norbert would certainly have tied off a loose end and given us closure on a story fragment regarding another one of Hagrid's appalling monsters, much as we got the end of Aragog's story in HBP. But really, given that it was OotP that echoed PS/SS, if Norbert had a further part to play in the story arc, you would have expected him to make his reappearance there (we would certainly have

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preferred meeting Norbert to Grawp). Given all the hints that DHs was setting up to echo PoA, if we were going to have to field one of Hagrid's wretched monsters as well, the logical candidate would have been Buckbeak.

And, besides, by that time many fans had also taken a good look at that dragon on the cover, pointed out that it does not at all resemble the illo of baby Norbert in PS/SS, OR the description of a Norwegian Ridgeback, and have pointed out that the grey, pupiless eye suggests that the creature was, in fact, an Antipodean Opaleye. I certainly was not gong to claim that they were wrong.

(ETA: although they were.)

....

As to the dragon turning out to be Draco Malfoy; permit me to point out that being named Rose does not mean you smell like one.

This variant of the theory also had two competing iterations. First; that the dragon was Draco's Animagus form.

Well, I'm sorry, but — leaving aside the fact that it has never been established that an Animagus form can take the shape of a Fantastic beast, as opposed to a natural one — it really seemed to me that Draco had far too much on his plate over the previous year to be engaging in a clandestine attempt to become an unregistered Animagus in the middle of it as well. It took the Marauders (who have been set up as being a good deal cleverer than Malfoy) from 2nd to 5th year to accomplish it, and there were three of them. Unless you were intending to claim that Crabbe and Goyle were also Animagi by now.



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You will have to excuse me if I insist upon saying that I did not believe it.

The rival iteration of this theory is that, no, this is not an Animagus transformation. This is straightforward human->animal Transfiguration. Basically that Snape (of all people) had transfigured Draco into a Dragon for some as yet unclear reason. Either to appear to “punish” the boy for failing to kill the headmaster, or to get him into a form in which it would be difficult for Lord Voldemort to do him any harm.

Or just to get him out of the firing lines.

The fly in that particular pot of ointment is that we were clearly told in the introductory portion of ‘Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them’ that the only way a human can take a human mind into an animal form is through the Animagus transformation. Straightforward Transfiguration into an Animal form gives you an animal mind.

However, that said, I will have to admit that the example given to illustrate this principle had a lot of potential for being another piece of pure misdirection. We were told that; say, if someone were to transfigure himself into a bat, with a tiny bat brain he would probably not be able to recall what he was doing and just filter off and lose himself.

A dragon, however is a rather large animal. With a large head, and presumably, a large brain. If brain size is actually an issue, it might conceivably be possible that if one were transfigured into a large creature, like a dragon, the large dragon brain might be able to retain the human memories, even if it didn’t precisely retain the human nature.

I’m not altogether convinced that such a transfiguration

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would include understanding human speech, however.

Yet, in interviews, Rowling had at one point brought up the story of young Eustace Clarence Scrubb who went to sleep on a dragon’s hoard, thinking greedy, dragonish thoughts, and woke up the following day in the shape of a dragon. And eventually learned better.

But like I say, I had a hard time taking the whole idea seriously.



### Item 10: Tonks

And so long as we are dealing with descendants of the Black family:

What was Tonks doing in this story? What purpose did she serve?

I sincerely doubted that her sole function was to dwindle into Lupin’s girlfriend.

It can’t have been for her Metamorphomagus ability either, because that had never served any real function in the narrative that couldn’t be served by some other means. Apart from comic relief, such as the scenes of her “picking her nose” at the dinner table.

So why was she there?

Even Rowling refers to Tonks in association with red herrings. Or something very much like that (joint interview, July 2005).

I thought Rowling might have intended for Tonks to serve as an example.

I’d come to the conclusion that poor Tonks was a beast of burden, heavily laden with pieces of exposition. I finally concluded that she was introduced expressly for the purpose of showing her coming apart in HBP, and to be pointed out early in



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the book as an example of what happens when a witch or wizard comes apart in that manner. The bright, brash, friendly Tonks of OotP was created solely to display the greatest possible contrast to the mopey, drippy one in HBP.

In short, she was there to set us up for meeting Merope Gaunt.

It was poorly handled. Cho Chang would have served just as well. In fact, I thought Cho would have served rather better. But Rowling didn't give herself the necessary wiggle room by ever showing us enough of Cho's normal behavior to draw a proper comparison. Still, from what we've got (ETA: and still have), that contrast seemed to be the whole *point* of Tonks.

After all, I seriously doubted that Rowling was suddenly going to catapult Tonks into central plot prominence in DHs. Although we might finally get a situation where we discover why Rowling thought it was necessary to introduce a Metamorphmagus into the narrative in the first place. But I doubted that it would be a major issue in the book. Indeed, I wouldn't have bet all that much on the likelihood of even that.

Because the significance of Tonks being a Metamorphmagus seemed to be no more than that such a flashy, super-special, Mary-Suish ability made for such a nice, loud, visible contrast which is really, really obvious when it goes away. I still rather think Rowling gave Tonks that ability just so she could take it away from her. At least temporarily.

Why? Well Rowling did use to generally prefer to introduce magical concepts before she really used them for an actual *purpose*, didn't she?

We were told that the dementors drain wizards of happiness, and \*of magic\* all the way back in PoA, but that in itself didn't

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make it clear that wizards can do the same thing to themselves, as well. Having Tonks apparently come undone from unrequited love, and start having difficulty transforming herself softened us up very nicely for when Merope was stated as having come apart in exactly the same manner, didn't it? We didn't even pause for a second to say; "Wait a minute..."

Although Sister Magpie pointed out on her Lj (or someone else pointed it out in Sister Magpie's Lj) that it wasn't necessarily grief that was crippling Tonks, but fear. She wasn't moping because she had "lost" her beloved, she was terrified that she was going to lose him (before she ever had him), either to Fenrir's band, or to the DEs or to some other horrible danger that he was out risking his neck amid. And given the really central significance that I cannot help but read into the whole issue of the Dementors = fear, I thought that whoever brought it up may have had something there.

But that's only one piece of exposition.

So what else had Tonks done, or had happen to her that we might want to watch out for?

Well, there was that "new Patronus" of hers. That is an awfully odd sort of a concept to introduce if you don't intend to make use of it. And you certainly can't claim that it served any sort of necessary function in HBP. I suspected there was a punch line yet to come regarding that one.

(ETA: as if.)

So was there anything else could we expect to see? CoS wasn't the last time we saw Polyjuice in action. Or PoA the last time we tripped over an Animagus. Could we expect to see someone else lose their magic from loss of confidence? Or from grief, or depres-



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sion, or terror? I thought that maybe we would. Maybe we should try to be alert to it. Because it could happen at a really bad time.

But to whom?

(And, ETA: a decade plus downstream of the closing of canon, Rowling's treatment of Tonks is now coming across as a particularly choice bit of foreshadowing. Especially given how eagerly a certain segment of the fandom had embraced Tonks as their gender-fluid poster child.)



### Item 11: The Unanswered Riddle

Which brings us to:

Lord Voldemort.

Ever since HBP came out there'd been an amazing amount of uproar regarding the official Riddle backstory. And I will have to say that I didn't think that was a particularly sound piece of work, myself.

It would be hard for Rowling to have come up with anything more contradictory to the message that she had presumably been harping on, since the beginning of the series, regarding the importance of our choices than the layout she had now given us.

The sly, cruel, manipulative young Tommy Riddle we met in the orphanage presents us with no real problems. We'd all rather expected him to have been that kind of kid all along. And all of his subsequent actions read according to our expectations as well.

But why did she have to depict Tom Riddle's particular brand of evil as being both effectively hereditary, and inevitable? (Or to pretend to depict it so.)

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"Bad seed" hypothesis effectively trump any issue of *choices*. "He's evil because he was *born* evil" isn't an illustration of any kind of *choice*.

We also got some reasonably solid evidence that it wasn't being raised in an orphanage that made him what he was, either. Harry admitted to himself that Tom Riddle's orphanage would have been a grim place to have grown up, but I suspect that, given the option, Harry might have chosen it over life with the Dursleys. Harry would have probably managed to be at least modestly happy in that orphanage. He might at least have had friends.

But Mrs Cole assures us that Tom was "a funny boy" from infancy; seldom cried, and as he got older was ...odd.

In short, he was already on the sociopath's road, only needing a little personal motivation to spur him along the way. The first time one of the older children tried to bully him he would have acquired that. His "choices" had probably all been made by the time he was three.

And that just didn't fit with what Rowling had always claimed was her message.

So; either she was falsifying her message, she didn't really understand it herself, or there was some additional factor that she hadn't told us yet, because, for all of his efforts, Albus didn't really have the whole picture.

Albus admitted that he makes mistakes.

In fact he claimed that his mistakes were likely to be huge ones.

And he didn't tell anyone everything he knew.

Given that Rowling was already laying new trails of gunpow-



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der to blow us all up with regarding no shortage of other issues raised in HBP, it really didn't feel like it was beyond reach of imagination that Albus might have missed something.

Tom Riddle had a lot of secrets. It was very unlikely that we'd managed to discover them all. Particularly not in only one book.

I was willing to concede that this reading of the matter did have a strong feeling of admiring the "Martian canals" and it might turn out to be just as much of an optical illusion as they had. But if it did, then there wasn't a lot of likelihood that I was going to much enjoy the enshrinement of the escalating hypocrisies of all Rowling's "Warriors for the Light" that seemed scheduled for the 7th book.

So, I was pinning my own hopes upon the reading that we were not going to have the whole story, until we had the *whole story*.

• • • •

But I'd been wrong before.

I took Rowling's hints on there being a Christian theme to the resolution of the series at face value in the spring of 2005 when I applied my understanding of Christianity to spinning out the original iteration of the Premature Prediction (now spun off and reposted in the 'Redeeming the Potterverse' essay). In that I postulated a "redemption pattern" which allowed for the salvation of Harry, Tom, and the wizarding world itself. It wasn't even that much of a stretch. The pieces were all there; it was all right out of the heroic journey monomyth; there wasn't anything to absolutely contradict it in canon; I thought it worked.

But post-HBP, Rowling did not seem to be intending to go

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there. There would probably be no 11th-hour redemption for Tom Riddle. Which, given that he seems never to have been equipped to make *proper* choices — practically from birth — at that stage of the proceedings came across as shoddy theology to match the flabby morality, enthroned hypocrisy, and situational ethics so conspicuously on parade through the Harry filter. But I did not yet have the "whole story" so followed that line of reasoning no further here.

Still, it did certainly look as though we ought to have taken Rowling at her word when she first started harping on the "he's not really human" string all the way back in the first book.

And, frankly, that's a Really Bad Sign on the order of poor little Billy Stubbs's strangled rabbit for the final play-out of this series. Because, after deliberately bringing up the issue of the complexities pertaining to a face-off between good vs. evil, and the moral indefensibility of killing that she had been at such pains to raise, if her final message boils down to simply; "he's evil. Kill him," and that was always her *real* intention, then it was hard not to read the decision as both a cop-out and an example of blatant and pervasive moral cowardice.

Because "heroes" need to face up to the results of their own actions.

And killing somebody, even an evil somebody, is not a minor action.

And trying to pretend that it's all right to kill someone because "he's not really human" is the argument of a fascist.

• • • •

For that matter; heroes do NOT exist to have the way always smoothed for them by everybody else, to be catered to, and to



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be absolved of all responsibility for the things that they may be going to be forced to do in order to fulfill the Hero's part, *before* they have even *done* it.

In the wizarding world, Harry Potter has been acclaimed as a hero from babyhood on the strength of his mother's actions. He's been told this. He *knows* this. But he has accepted the preferential treatment of an acclaimed hero because, if nothing else, he hadn't properly known how not to. But the fact remains that being treated as a hero, does not make him one.

He had a battle thrust upon him at the end of GoF, and he acquitted himself well. But to escape from a trap does not necessarily make him a hero either.

In PoA the main actors of a positively Jacobean revenge tragedy ambushed him and threw him into the Hero's rôle, and let him make the final decision as to how the action should play out. He went through the proper motions. And everyone appeared to be agreeing to play their appointed parts. But the minute they were out on the main grounds, Pettigrew tossed the script back in their faces and dodged out, and nobody seemed to have been prepared for that, *despite* what they all knew of Pettigrew's past history.

In HBP he finally learned to follow orders. That didn't make him a hero either.

The awareness of being regarded as a hero contributed majorly to Harry's leaping into ill-considered and unnecessary action at the end of both PS/SS and OotP. Both of which exercises ended with somebody's death.

And in both cases, he would have done much better to stay out of the matter. In fact, in both cases the artifact that the

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whole scam was wrapped around had been quite safe until he meddled with things.

Only in CoS can Harry be legitimately said to have truly acted as a hero on his own initiative. No one else was going to rescue his best friend's little sister if he didn't. And no one else had the one quality that was needed to access where she had been taken.

When stripped of the usual glamour which tends to be draped around it, "Hero's business" turns out to usually be a thoroughly nasty, dirty, dangerous, and usually thankless (and/or *embarrassing*) piece of work that you just have to go in and get done. And you *cannot* depend on being honored for it. But you do have to *Take Responsibility* for your actions.

Harry has a monumental problem with facing up to the consequences of his actions.

In GoF he inadvertently led Cedric Diggory into a death trap.

A few nightmares aside, he seems to have managed to get over any guilt regarding that mistake fairly quickly by distracting himself with paranoia over Voldemort's anticipated future actions. None of which materialized for a year afterwards.

His foolhardiness (and forgetfulness over the fact that he *HAD* that 2-way mirror) in OotP got Sirius Black killed..

Before the day was out, he was in the process of deflecting the blame for that death onto Severus Snape, over a few utterly predictable spiteful comments that Snape had made *months* earlier, and onto Dumbledore for telling Sirius to stay at home where he was safe..

The following year in HBP he nearly killed another student by his own hand by rashly using an unknown spell in an



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impromptu duel.

That shocked and horrified him, yes. But once he got over the shock (which happened the minute he hitched up with a new girlfriend who applauded him for his actions) he sullenly resented the detentions that nearly committing manslaughter had earned him, because it took up his Saturdays and kept him out of a Quidditch game.

Harry Potter needed to learn a BIG lesson in personal responsibility.

Even if he IS a “hero”

And, imho, he *wasn't* a hero yet.

The function of a hero, in the kind of a story that Rowling seemed to be trying to convince us that this series was, is to remove the threat posed by the villain. This is not supposed to be glamorous. It is supposed to be necessary.

And we had met the villain. And, yes, he had to be stopped. Even if he could be absolved for his choices on the grounds that he was not ever equipped to make proper choices, he had to be stopped, much in the same way that a rabid dog has to be stopped. And everything Rowling did with the character had only served to dehumanize him.

Which was a cop out and renders the whole problem fake.

And it was beginning to look as if the point of this exercise was so that when Harry finally vanquished the Dark Lord at the climax of the 7th book, he would be merely destroying a Horcrux rather than killing a man.



### Item 12: A Very Good Hater



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Or maybe not.

We could certainly be forgiven for anticipating that it would eventually come to that. Everything to that point certainly had led us to *believe* that in the end it would be Harry who had to personally destroy Voldemort. And this could certainly have been the direction Rowling intended to take it.

But there is no denying that it made for a very mixed message if on one hand killing another person is presented as the ultimate evil, one which may even split your immortal soul, and then to turn around and set it up that to kill Voldemort was somehow going to be wholesome, glorious and noble. It simply didn't add up. Even if Voldemort “isn't really human.” In the cosmic balance I suspected it would still read as killing a man.

Ergo: even if she didn't take it there, I felt obligated to point out that when the matter was more closely examined, it turned out that she had given us enough winks and nudges, and strewn around a large enough bunch of hints for us to realize that she'd really given herself an astonishing amount of undisclosed wiggle-room, and a couple of viable “chicken-outs” which would keep Harry's soul intact to the last page, but still take Voldemort out of the equation.

(I knew that it would happen. Within a couple of weeks after posting the updated essay collection, I knew that somebody would be bound to ask me a question, and I would be forced to push something a few yards further down the track to the point that something else would click into place. It always has.)

...

So, ask yourself:





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Given everything that Dumbledore has ever had to say on the subject throughout the series — and in particular what he had to say on the issue in HBP — he could hardly WANT to see Harry Potter, charter member of the “Pure Hearts Club,” compromise the integrity of his soul by killing Lord Voldemort, could he?

(Assuming that killing somebody in an open fight, in self defense, would do that anyway. Which upon reflection is looking like somewhat less than a certainty.)

But even Dumbledore appeared to believe that it must inevitably come to that. He admitted to Harry that he realized that Harry would never rest until he at least made the attempt to destroy his enemy.

And therein lay a possible, very muddy, detour on the bumpy road to redemption; for Albus must have known that to be able to cast an effective killing curse, one has to be capable of the bitterest sort of hatred. Mere righteous anger will probably not sustain a killing curse any more than it will sustain Cruciatus.

Which I thought might go some way towards explaining the totally bizarre game of good-cop/bad-cop that he and Severus Snape had been playing with Harry ever since Harry first showed up at the school.

For it is clear to the reader that for some as yet unexplained reason, it appeared to be vitally necessary for Harry Potter to hate Severus Snape.

Snape had gone out of his way to teach the boy to hate him. He never eased up on this extra credit course of study for a minute. And; for all that Dumbledore always insisted that Harry scrupulously maintain all of the outward forms of

## Endgame: Expectations

respect and good manners in his form of address concerning Professor Snape, he did little to deflect this process; only steadfastly defending his own choice to trust the man. This cannot be accidental.

And by this time, it did not seem to be merely necessary on the “meta” level, for Rowling’s purposes, either. I did not think that she was throwing Harry-hates-Snape into the pot to serve as a pinch of instant conflict, the way so many fanfic authors tossed in Voldemort-suspects-Snape by the handfuls over the course of the 3-year summer. The characters and the storyline genuinely seemed to need this. And at that point we could still only feebly try to determine why. And, in common with just about everything else to do with Severus Snape, I suspected the true reason comes lumbered with a considerable (and as yet unrevealed) backstory.

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More recently, I had come to the conclusion that for Harry to hate Snape, and to be known to hate Snape was a source of protection for Snape.

Snape and Albus must have always known that if Voldemort was not dead, their work was not done. There was always the possibility that he might manage to return and that Snape was going to have to work his way inside the DEs again in order to bring about a final defeat.

Consequently, their purposes would be best served by keeping Harry well away from him.

Of course the whole issue got further complicated by Voldemort’s attempt to return in Harry’s first year. With Tom actu-



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ally in the school and monitoring everyone's actions there was no way that Snape could afford to take anything but an adversarial stance against Harry Potter. And Quirrell shoved his oar in at the end of the year with the whole "he hated your father too" thread, which just kept the cauldron a-bubbling.

But the fact that Snape took the opportunity to immediately re-open hostilities as soon as Harry and Ron finally managed to land the Ford Anglia in the Willow suggests that to keep these two key characters from ever finding common ground was very much, and very deliberately in somebody's best interests.



### Item 13: The One with the Power

Still, for all of the weight of significance that this, now fully developed, hatred of Severus Snape may have for Harry, it doesn't really get us a whole lot further toward a satisfactory conclusion regarding the problem presented by Lord Voldemort.

And on that subject, just as in the matter of the Prophecy, I think that for all his alleged cleverness and wisdom, Albus Dumbledore may have missed the point.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that Albus Dumbledore was not JK Rowling. His average was better than just about anyone else's in the story, but he didn't necessarily know everything that was going on. And his reading of the requirements of the situation was not necessarily that of the author.

Because if a Prophecy is a load of old pants, then it's *all* a load of old pants.

Albus claimed to believe, and explained to Harry, that Prophecies usually aren't anything until someone tries to do

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something about them. Which is why the Ministry has established that policy of suppressing them. Tom Riddle — who for all his brilliance and talent is fundamentally very unwise — let himself be tricked into trying to prevent this one from coming true. By doing so, he set up the very conditions that the Prophecy describes.

But, Albus says, it's a Prophecy, and Prophecies are still a load of old pants, and if Tom and Harry choose to shake hands and go their separate ways nothing whatsoever would happen. The rest of the Prophecy would probably never play out.

Or, at least not according to Albus Dumbledore. Who admits that he never studied Divination.

That may be a part of the problem.

Of course the likelihood of a truce between Tom and Harry was always zilch, so there is no point in dwelling on it. Tom could never be trusted to leave bad enough alone, and Harry simply could not agree to live his life perpetually looking over his shoulder for the attack that he knew must surely come. That is no kind of life. Until the issue with the Dark Lord was settled, he didn't "have a life"

But Albus seems to have overlooked the fact that Prophecies are not innocent, they do not *ever* mean well, and that their entire purpose is to deceive the listener into bringing about his own ruin.

And *HE* listened to that one

And it ruined him. Albus Dumbledore trapped himself (and Harry) every bit as thoroughly as he trapped Tom Riddle by letting that Prophecy escape. (More than just that. By *calling attention* to it.) The gamble appeared to be paying off at that



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point. But the price was astronomically high, and it hadn't ever been necessary.

In fact, I thought it could be the biggest mistake Harry ever made to try. Right up to and including the possibility that if he failed, prematurely, Voldemort wasn't going anywhere without a half-dozen more lives lost, assuming enough people would know about the Horcruxes by that point to know that they had to find and destroy them. And, at the moment it looked like way too many people — and particularly Albus Dumbledore — have been determined to protect Tom Riddle's secrets for him for that to be likely.

Even Prophecies have to play by their own rules.

However much they may lie about those rules.

Which they do. Or, as near to lying as makes no difference.

(ETA: the actual situation turns out to have been even worse than that. Each one of the seven Horcruxes was finally destroyed by a different person. So there was *demonstrably* no need for a super-special, mystic hero in order to get rid of the Horcruxes. And the inadvertent Harrycrux wouldn't have even existed if Albus had kept that Prophecy from escaping. Far from making it easier to get rid of Voldemort, the Harrycrux only complicated matters, by adding an additional and very fiddly obstacle to the project.)

• • • •

Albus did do his best to defuse the "And either must die by the hand of the other" clause when he was speaking of it to Harry. And I thought that was smart of him, because that part of the thing struck me as a piece of deliberate misdirection cal-



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culated to goad the hearer into inadvisable action of the sort which is much better ignored.

But eliminate that clause, and what are you left with?

And, no. I was not one of those ingenious sorts who were out doing various contortions, trying to prove that the "other" mentioned in the text of the Prophecy was some additional, as yet undetermined third party, who was intrinsic to this mess. There are plenty of other 3rd parties already tied up in this knot, but there was no mysterious "other" that the Prophecy is referring to. The Prophecy was only concerned with the Dark Lord and the child. Or rather; "the One with the Power."

The power to "vanquish" the Dark Lord.

It doesn't say kill, does it?

In fact, the Prophecy never does say kill, although it does say "die."

Albus Dumbledore claimed to be convinced that the specific power that Harry possessed was nothing less than the power of deep human attachment, which is certainly a power that Tom Riddle knows not; and Albus contended that this was the power that would ultimately bring down Lord Voldemort.

I certainly could not say that he was wrong. In fact, I agreed that the power of human attachment would almost certainly be a major part of what eventually brought Voldemort down. (Oh, as if.)

After all, it had certainly thwarted him at every confrontation so far.

In 1981 Lily's love for her child destroyed his body and threw him into more than a decade of spectral existence.

In 1992 the residual effects of Lily's sacrifice still kept him from touching Harry, contributed to destroying Quirrell's body





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— that he had taken over — and threw him back into that spectral existence.

In 1993 Harry's professed loyalty to Dumbledore brought him not only the weapon necessary to kill the Basilisk, but Fawkes, who assisted him in the battle and was able to heal him of the Basilisk's poison.

In 1995 the echoes of Tom's own victims in support for the child he had abducted, used, and intended to kill impeded Voldemort long enough to allow Harry to escape him.

In 1996 Harry's attachment to Sirius seems to have been sufficient to throw Voldemort out of his head.

So it was not at all unreasonable to suppose that the ability to form such attachments would contribute to the final outcome of the showdown which was expected in the spring of 1998, too.

But, as I point out in the essay concerning the Prophecy; in the Potterverse the power of human attachment is not exactly thin on the ground. And Harry's possession of this quality was neither broader nor deeper than that of most of the other people we have met there.

Despite our expectations, I thought that it was not necessarily Harry's supposedly great power of attachment which was the relevant factor. At that point, I thought that Harry's true advantage might lie very much elsewhere insofar as finding a final answer to the seven Riddles goes.

In fact; the indications were that Harry's specific power to vanquish the Dark Lord might lie in a direction that Albus seemed not to have even considered.

Or at least he did not ever admit to it.

Nor, in consideration, was I wrong about that. But the essay

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devoted to 'The Power He "Knows Not"' wasn't added to the collection until some time after canon closed. You can find that one in the Missed Opportunities' sub-collection.

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As I point out in the essays regarding the Horcruxes; we didn't really know how to destroy one when we found it, did we? Of course you probably *could* pitch them through the Veil. But pitching them through the Veil is rather on the order of a trek up Mt Doom. For all that I was pretty sure we would get back to Hall of the Veil eventually, I wasn't convinced that was how Rowling intended to solve that particular part of the problem. So far as we knew to date, the only thing that appeared to destroy a Horcrux was to break the artifact that it was created from to let the soul fragment out.

But to destroy the artifact without killing yourself in the process might be a lot easier said than done. Certainly if even Dumbledore got fatally blasted by a curse which was invoked attempting to do it (and one did believe that Albus would not have approached the problem incautiously). (ETA: well, so we thought *then*.) It sounds like Riddle did a very good job of protecting his Horcruxes.

Of course it also looked like he did not put the same amount of work into protecting *all* of them. The Locket — if the one we saw at #12 was the Horcrux — was being passed hand to hand around the room without ill-effect. The Diary, as a weapon, was supposedly able to protect itself, and yet it was destroyed by a 12-year-old in what appears to be a bit of a fluke. Harry came to no harm at all by destroying the book. (Yes, the Basi-



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lisk nearly killed him, but the Basilisk wasn't the Horcrux.)

Or was that the point?

Let's run that all past us again.

**Point:** Albus Dumbledore, believed by many to be the greatest wizard of modern times, destroyed a Horcrux and allegedly would have died of it right then, but for his own prodigious skills and the timely intervention of Severus Snape. The curse was not ended, however. He had a blasted wand hand until the day of his death. Which followed in less than a year.

**Point:** 12-year-old Harry Potter destroyed a Horcrux and got himself shrieked at and splattered with ink.

Maybe, just maybe, that wasn't the fluke it sounds like.

I suspected that — if he chose to, Lord Voldemort could probably destroy any of the bloody things without taking any additional harm from it, too. It would read him as a part of itself, and raise no automatic defenses.

Maybe carrying your ID as the 6th Horcrux around on your forehead means you can disarm any of the others without getting blown up by it. (The power to “vanquish” the Dark Lord.) Maybe that's what the Prophecy's claim that Voldemort marked him as his equal amounts to. The power to vanquish the Dark Lord was the power to destroy the Horcruxes.

Maybe Harry's job wasn't to destroy Voldemort himself at all. Harry's job was just to destroy the Horcruxes. Trying to destroy Voldemort himself could be as much of a snare and a delusion as Voldemort's attempt to protect himself by murdering Harry.

After all, repeat: once the bloody Horcruxes are out of action, Tom will be mortal again. ANYONE can kill him.

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And who was closest to him now?

(What was that old chess analogy again about the two bishops, between them, covering the whole board?)

• • • •

I really was swinging round to the viewpoint that being the 6th Horcrux might enable Harry to destroy the damned things without being blasted for his trouble. It might even help him recognize one when he finds it.

Although it certainly didn't do so as readily as he needed it to, not if that locket in Grimmauld Place was one of them. And youth, sheer ignorance and inexperience don't really explain his not having had *any* particular reaction to the Diary. Or the Diary *Revenant*, either. I suspect that Rowling simply dropped the ball there. Or couldn't bear to give the readers a viable *clue*.

But at least it still suggested that we might not be getting quite such a mixed message after all. Dumbledore would hardly want Harry Potter to be forced into killing someone directly, even if it was in self defense, or by the way of a necessary execution. It's still killing.

But destroying Horcruxes, evidently isn't.

It might be Snape who would get the honor of actually killing Voldemort.

Frankly I was half hoping to see Snape to show up at the climax of the series like the 7th cavalry with Fawkes on his shoulder. That would be one in the eye for Harry. It wasn't just Dumbledore who trusted Snape.

Ah, well.





## Endgame: Expectations

### Item 14: And Either Must Die...

And for that matter, so long as we are playing around with the bloody Prophecy, one of the boards I hang out on eventually attempted to do a closer analysis of the “And either must die at the hand of the other” clause of the fool thing.

Frankly, given the inherently garbled obstructionism of prophecy-speak (which Swythyv has so appropriately christened bafflegab) I doubted that we were going to arrive at any solid conclusions there. But it made for a couple of reasonably interesting exchanges. The following was my own contribution (I left the verb tenses alone in this one, the discussion was some years ago, after all):

• • • •

*“... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...”*

And just what does that boil down to?

Actually the whole statement feels like a change of subject when taken with the rest of the comments and statements in that Prophecy.

Frankly, from where I’m standing, it still sounds like a gaudy lure to unwise action. Tom Riddle was tempted into unwise action merely by the statement that the one with the power to vanquish him would be born to those who had thrice defied him, born as the 7th month dies. I get the feeling that the “And either must die at the hand of the other” line is the lure to tempt Harry into doing something stupid as well.

But it does still have to *mean* something.

So, what’s the catch? It stands to reason that there is a catch. Well, right off the top; the “at” clanks upon the ear, and I

## Endgame: Expectations

don’t think that it is there by accident. Wouldn’t you expect the thing to say that either must die “by” the hand of the other if it meant one of them was supposed to kill the other? In normal usage something that is “at” hand, is merely something in proximity.

Which it would certainly chime in tune with the drum that was being banged on all through book 6 that killing other people is wrong, and it can damage your own soul to do it. That being the case, you hardly get the message that either Albus or the author actively want Harry to kill Voldemort directly.

• • • •

Do you know; I am now wondering whether that was the point of Albus hauling Harry off to the sea cave and ordering Harry to poison him. Because I am half convinced that if Albus is dead, he died of the poison, not Snape’s AK. And yet, if this is the case, although Albus technically died by Harry’s hand (or was that “at”?), his death was, if anything, assisted suicide not murder. Nevertheless, I seriously doubt that Harry’s soul took any significant damage from it. No more than it was split by inadvertently leading Cedric into a death trap.

So does “at” in Prophecy-speak mean, to cause a death, but not do the killing oneself? Knock him through the Veil, rather than AK him?

Or does it just mean that the task requires proximity? If the final showdown takes place in the death chamber of the DoM, proximity could matter. It could matter a lot.

If the “vanquished” soul fragments pass through the Veil when they are forced out of the Horcruxes, they might exert some sort of magnetic pull on their owner (or Harry) if you can



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get him close enough to the Veil to be subject to it.

After all, if a soul is in 7 parts, having five of them on the other side of the Veil could constitute a risk for the other two if they get in range. The last time Harry was there, there was only one of those fragments on the other side to draw him, but he did seem to feel a pull, didn't he?

(Let's have a wrestling match on the footpath above the Richenbach falls, why don't we? Somebody died there, but nobody murdered anybody.)

We probably ought in fairness to remember that it wasn't just Harry who felt that pull. Luna, Neville, and Ginny were also drawn to the Veil. In contrast, Ron was completely unaffected by it, and Hermione seems to have been repulsed, and actively frightened by it. Also, Harry, Ginny, and Neville all seem to have needed to be physically pulled away from it, while somehow Luna either managed to pull herself back on her own, or was not so deeply affected (possibly due to having been able to detach herself and analyze what the Veil was, and what she was hearing?). This might be a clue that while they were all four affected, they did not necessarily all experience the same thing.

And, once there are six parts of Tom Riddle's soul on the other side of the Veil, might that pull the final one out of Harry? Particularly if he had the presence of mind to take a penknife or a slicing hex to the scar?

Especially if Ron and Hermione grab hold of him to keep him from going through it physically. (Friendship; the power the Dark Lord knows not. I doubt that, even if LV does show up with minions that they would do squat to save him. Although Bellatrix might just follow him in.)



## Endgame: Expectations

...

And then there is the "for neither can live while the other survives" bit. In the opaque language of Prophecies, evidently neither of them is "living" now. Harry certainly doesn't "have a life," and Voldemort is in some weird sort of half, or three-quarters life, housed in a body cobbled together to simulate his previous one. But he is quite literally, "not all there."

When you stop to think about it, even the Lord Voldemort identity was created by screwing about with his true name and leaving inconvenient — and potentially the most significant — parts out of it. (I,A,M, Lord Voldemort) This pretty accurately reflects his spiritual state ever since he created the first of his collection of Horcruxes. "Lord Voldemort" is an artificial construct in every fundamental way; physically, spiritually, and even the identity of Lord Voldemort. The only thing left of Tom Riddle that is intact is his memory. Perhaps. We can't even be sure of that.

And essentially, Tom hasn't really been "all there" since he was Harry's age.

Maybe one *should* just zap him with Obliviate and steer him through the Veil.

But what I'm now puzzling over is the "and neither can live" statement when viewed from a quasi-metaphysical standpoint. The two "real" people involved here are/were Harry Potter and Tom Riddle. The "Lord Voldemort" construction is as bogus as its (Muggle-style) title, although it seems to have taken on a half-life of its own. And what the semantic problem all appears to hinge upon is what in prophecy-speak defines the verb "to live"?





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Both Harry and Tom are currently “alive,” at least in a technical sense. But the artificial Voldemort merely “survives.”

....

There is certainly no question of Tom truly “living” so long as his soul is in pieces, and the pieces are scattered to the four winds and distributed on both sides of the Veil. Regardless of whether Harry survives or not, Tom will only be able to “live” once the parts are reintegrated. And that is clearly impossible this side of the Veil.

And, as for Harry; for all that he has derived some advantages from carrying around a piece of somebody else’s soul as well as his own, it is not exactly doing him any day-to-day good. And I am not convinced that it will prove any advantage in a face-to-face duel with its original owner. Once he has disarmed the other (two?) (three?) remaining Horcruxes, he needs to get rid of it ASAP. Which will probably best be accomplished in the chamber with the Veil.

Which brings us back to the “...and either must die...” statement as a whole. I’ve run into some amazing backbends being performed by determined fans who fight the good fight insisting that “the other” mentioned in the Prophecy has to be some as yet undetermined 3rd party. I flatly don’t buy it. The Prophecy speaks of the One, and the Dark Lord and I don’t think that it is concerned with 3rd-parties.

But how does it read if you solidly identify “the other” as the “Lord Voldemort” construction?

*“... and either (Tom or Harry) must die at the hand of (the artificial) Lord Voldemort, because neither can live while “Lord*

## Endgame: Expectations

*Voldemort” survives...”*

It really doesn’t come across as *complete* nonsense, does it?

It sounds rather as if one needs to maneuver Voldemort into destroying himself.

....

Well; it’s not as if it hasn’t been done before.

Twice, in fact.

Albus set him up for targeting the subject of a Prophecy, and Lily (ETA: inadvertently) maneuvered him into killing her instead of Harry. We all know what that led to.

And it isn’t like he hasn’t been gradually destroying Tom Riddle from the day he created his first Horcrux.

If not before.

....

ETA: I am crogged. I got that issue absolutely, totally, completely *right*.

Yes, there was more to it than that, ofcourse. But “Voldemort” WAS “the Other,” and neither could live in his proximity. Harry, because Voldemort would keep trying to murder him, and the Tom fragment because it went into convulsions whenever he showed up. And I suspect that only Voldemort could have killed the fragment without killing Harry as well. And quite possibly only by trying to use the frapping Elder Wand to do it, too. Of course the prophecy was completely bas-ackward in its pronouncement. The truth was that neither Harry nor Tom could *die* so long as both survived — in Harry.



## Endgame: Possibilities

Our wayback machine is still set to early-late May-June 2007. Before the release of DHs

This article, like the one on Expectations, is mostly untouched, apart from some minor changes in format, external spell checking, the adjustment of verb tenses (some of which I may still have missed), and a few more grumpy annotations. But it has not seriously been revised in view of the final book. As with the other piece, some parts of this have been repeated in other essays in the collection. Although this group in some ways is a bit more freestyle and a lot less nailed-down than most of the theories elsewhere in the collection.

So. Once more into the breach...



### Item 1: Revisiting Book 3

**A**t the end of HBP I had to admit to being rather hopeful of the pattern that Rowling appeared to have established for the last three books of her series, in which she might potentially repeat the themes and actions of the *first* three books. I was also fairly hopeful about the multiple indications that the events of Book 7 might be expected to reflect the events of Book 3. Most of us liked Book 3. The real question was; how much could we depend upon this. Because it seemed to me that the salient point of the conclusion of PoA was that nobody and nothing died of it. Rowling had already publicly claimed that this was not going to be the case with DHs. And, indeed, with Voldemort in the equation it could hardly be so.

But in fact, we do not know of a single death that took place

## Endgame: Possibilities

during PoA. And the final climax of that book was not about the destroying of things but the rescuing of them.

Earlier in the book, Scabbers was believed to have been killed. But he wasn't. He faked it.

MUCH earlier in the story, Peter Pettigrew was believed to have been killed. But he wasn't. He faked it.

The Fat Lady really was attacked, but she got away, frightened, but unhurt. Her canvas needed repairs, but she was all right.

Buckbeak was condemned, and scheduled for execution, but he escaped.

And Harry's primary decisions at the final show-down were to forgive the traitor and to preserve the innocent.

He braved the willow and followed the Grim to rescue Ron.

He couldn't force himself to kill Crookshanks, even though that meant sparing Sirius Black. (Whom he "hated more than Voldemort" — sound familiar, much?)

He quite deliberately and voluntarily spared Pettigrew, who, by then, he *knew* had betrayed him and his parents to Lord Voldemort.

He then went on to put considerable effort into saving Buckbeak AND Sirius Black.

And, in reward for this, he managed to connect with the one part of James Potter which still lived on within himself — which is the only part that still mattered.

And he couldn't have saved himself, or his friends, if he had not done so. They would have never made it from the Willow back to the castle if he hadn't.

So how much of this could we really expect to see transposed to Book 7?



## Endgame: Possibilities

(Query: how much did Sirius Black owe the cosmic balance for his part in the original werewolf caper? And to whom? For, from what we knew at the time, it certainly sounded like he wronged just about everyone involved in that stunt except Pettigrew. Did he ever repay that cosmic debt? Did he repay it by spending 12 years in Azkaban, or did his debt require that additional year immured in the Black family hell and a quick trip through the Veil?)



### Item 2: Book 7 = Book 3?

For that matter; once we'd had some time to think about the situation, it was fun to kick around some possibilities. They couldn't *all* be wrong.

HRH might find the Ravenclaw or Gryffindor relic (assuming there was one) in the ruins at Godric's Hollow, and Harry would destroy it and nothing whatsoever would happen. It hadn't been a Horcrux after all. Tom never got the chance to turn it into a Horcrux. This throws them into an in-depth discussion about the relics, and someone would finally remember the Locket at Grimmauld place.

Next stop Grimmauld Place.

Rowling's answer to a FAQ poll that the death of the Secret Keeper "freezes" the status of the secret at the point it was when that death occurs, which denied us the dramatic possibilities of Harry returning to Grimmauld Place to find that he has uninvited guests.

Always spoiling our fun, she is...

(ETA: and she spoiled it even more by rewriting the rules



## Endgame: Possibilities

and trying to amp up the "drama" by trying to convince us that he might still get uninvited guests. After having already set the stage up to explicitly disallow it. Not buying it Rowling! We know you're talking through your hat.)

....

Ah, well, let us move on.

The Locket will eventually turn up, but I suspected it would probably lead us all a merry dance through most of the book before it did. It would finally surface. But I was no longer convinced that it would do so in Kreacher's nest. I suspected that would be altogether too easy, and, more to the point, give us no further leads.

I thought Harry might remember having seen Mundungus Fletcher and the silver goblets with the barman of the Hog's Head in Hogsmeade.

Next stop Hogsmeade. (Unless Harry insisted on questioning Mundungus in Azkaban.)

We'd get another round of discussion on where things stand, this time possibly including Aberforth, who may by then have been outed as Albus's brother, and partner in espionage, at least to HRH. Someone brings up the subject of Godric's sword. Someone else finally remembers that the Hat was also Godric's originally.

Off to Hogwarts (which is still closed) to question the Hat about where it got the sword. Possibly through the Honeydukes passage, since the school is closed.

....

At some point during the trio's interview with the Hat some-





## Endgame: Possibilities

thing wakes the portraits of the ex-Headmasters/Headmistresses. Revelations ensue. Not enough of them, however. In any event Harry will learn something related to the founders via the Hat. Actually I always did think this or something like this would happen in Book 7. I thought it could be significant, but probably not as much as the fans would have liked.

In the meantime the Locket continues to evade us. We may even trip over the Cup unexpectedly before we catch up to the Locket.

In any case, once they do get hold of it, the Locket will turn out to be the real McCoy, and Harry will finally manage to get it open (probably by telling it to open up in Parseltongue. It was Slytherin's, after all) and let the soul fragment out, without coming to any harm by it. That's three down that we know of. If they'd already tripped over the Cup, four.

....

Keeping the Book 7 = Book 3 parallels in mind, somewhere in the middle of the book the Cup may turn up *à la* the Firebolt. Which should be a considerable relief, even if it does throw everyone for a bit of a loop. Or what turns up may not be the Cup, but some other item of importance.

(ETA: it occurs to me that in the book we actually got, this was right about the point in the story that we were suddenly thrown the issue of those stupid Hallows.)

Somewhere in the stretch between Godric's Hollow and Hogwarts they might get the clues they need to finally guess the identity of Horcrux #5, but the information won't sink in for a while.

Conversely; #5 might only turn up in the final confrontation.



## Endgame: Possibilities

I was beginning to suspect that Harry would be forced into the final face-off long before he was ready for it.

And that it might play well if at the showdown Harry should turn out to have custody of one of the last two Horcruxes and Voldemort the other.

(ETA: well, they did. Although the snake was slithering around a battlefield by that point.)

....

At that point, we had no idea what Horcrux #5 might be, although Dr John Granger's hypothesis that it was Voldemort's wand sounded awfully tempting. Rowling had held back any real information on this one for Book 7. (ETA: considering the book 7 rewrite the Horcruxes were given which turned them all into One Ring clones, even if #5 *had* been a wand, it wouldn't have been one that anyone would be *using*.)

Unless, of course, you wanted to make an argument for that extravagantly cursed silver-and-opal necklace that kept crossing our path. (What happened to it btw?) You probably could. It's got a history attached to it. It's got a fair degree of grandeur. We don't know how long it was sitting in a display case at Borgin & Burkes. One could make a case for Tom having turned it into a Horcrux just before he decamped the first time, and given the curses on it nobody is likely to have wanted to get close enough to it to have subjected it to much examination. But I couldn't really see him leaving one of his Horcruxes in a display case where it might be sold and he would lose track of it. Or a shop window, either.

In any case, if #5 wasn't the wand, it would still probably





## Endgame: Possibilities

turn out to be somewhere in Great Britain, and HRH will be able to track it down, and Harry would disarm it as well.

Or IT would be the item to play Firebolt. That was a possibility, too.

And if it *was* a wand, we may get some kind of information related to it from Mr Olivander who will turn out to have been living in hiding for the past year.

• • • •

By that point they would now be either 4 or 5 down, with only 1 (or 2) to go. And, in trying to figure out how they are supposed to get at the Snake, they FINALLY start asking themselves why Harry was able to destroy the rest of them without taking any hurt when even Dumbledore couldn't manage that. And eventually they figure out that the last one *isn't* the snake.

And there really just was no plausible explanation for Harry's being a Parselmouth, or his connection to Voldemort without factoring in the probability of Harry being the unintended repository for one of Voldemort's soul fragments.

So how do they get the last soul fragment out of Harry?

• • • •

Back to Hogwarts to interview the ghosts as to where the soul resides in a living person. Does it permeate the whole body, or reside in the heart, or the head, or where? The fragment is lodged in Harry's forehead. (Probably embedded in his skull, right under the scar.)

Because the real "cruX" of the matter is how do you disarm the 6th Horcrux if you are carrying the fragment around in your forehead.



## Endgame: Possibilities

And, one of the disadvantages of making a Horcrux from a living creature, is that living creatures die.

But, technically, the 6th Horcrux is Harry's *skull*.

It will still be his skull even if he isn't living.

Sacrificing himself by walking through the Veil, to bring his enemy down would certainly be one way to neutralize it.

Or — we were led to believe — standing there and letting Voldemort kill him should do it. This is the script that carries the biggest \*bang\* factor to most of the fans. But the problem with that solution is that it wouldn't necessarily accomplish it.

Unless wizards routinely practice cremation — as was suggested by Dumbledore's funeral pyre — Harry's skull would still be left, safely buried, on this side of the Veil, so simply killing Harry wouldn't automatically solve the problem.

And I wasn't convinced that Rowling had the guts to pull this one, anyway.

(ETA: well, she did, just not for keeps.)

On the other hand, the fact that Voldemort didn't *intend* for Harry to be a Horcrux means that there are probably no protective curses laid on that one. All it might take to get the soul fragment out of Harry would be to cut the scar open and let it out.

Or banish it with an exorcism.

(Which we do have reason to believe exists in the Potterverse. It was being discussed in relation to Peeves all the way back in Book 1.)

But, like I say, it turned out that she'd given herself a number of chicken-outs for getting rid of this particular Horcrux.

For that matter, neither of the following possibilities is completely satisfactory either, but either one might work.





## Endgame: Possibilities



### Item 3: Alternate Extrapolations

The less satisfactory version is that by questioning the Hogwarts ghosts they discover that the soul normally resides in the heart and not the head, which sends them to the DoM for Harry to slice the scar open, and possibly to carefully stick his forehead through one of the holes in the Veil. There's all kinds of interesting ways that could go wrong.

This would make a good jumping off point for a final 3–4 chapters of the book and the departure point for that spirit quest that seemed so likely at the end of OotP. (It seemed a good deal less so at the end of HBP, but it was still not completely out of the picture as a possibility.)

A somewhat more satisfactory, but far less probable direction would be to discover that the Dementors aren't as black as they're painted.

Which would either leave Harry forced to face his worst fear — which is the Dementors — not Voldemort, if you recall, and to have to permit one to approach him and \*kiss\* it off him, hoping that he can manage to drive it away before it goes for his own soul, or, worse, having to trust it to take no more than what he is offering and to withdraw when it has it.

That could be highly dramatic, but it's not a good jumping-off place for the last leg of any extended spirit journeys. There is probably no spirit quest in this scenario. In this version that would be the point at which all hell breaks loose in the final face-off.

I was pretty sure that even if I was overestimating Volde-

## Endgame: Possibilities

mort's wits and he hadn't figured out that Harry had possession of his final soul fragment, he would still be perfectly capable of rolling up to the final showdown with a Dementor in tow, since by then he must have been told that the kid is particularly vulnerable to them.

....

So the resulting scene plays out:

HRH are at the showdown. Which I still thought was most likely to be at the DoM. Perhaps Harry was preparing to stick his forehead through the Veil after all.

Voldemort shows up with Snape, and probably Pettigrew. Bellatrix will have gotten hers earlier in the book. Or, maybe she'd be there instead of Peter, although Peter was more likely to have survived to that point. Peter was a survivor. But whichever of the two of them it was, they would finally bite it. Voldemort would be disarmed, but that's not likely to slow him down a lot.

Voldemort then sets the Dementor on Harry, who by now knows he is carrying the last soul fragment, so he stands firm to let it take him.

The Dementor swoops down and Kisses the scar off of Harry's forehead and either withdraws voluntarily, or is driven off — either by Hermione & Ron, or (my preference) by a phoenix Patronus that various members of the Order have been reporting having seen at key points of the book. They have been entertaining the hope that Dumbledore is not dead upon the strength of it, for Albus's Patronus had always taken the form of a phoenix. (But then, we have also been informed



## Endgame: Possibilities

that after a period of emotional upheaval, a wizard's Patronus can change.)

(ETA: what, by the way happened to that thread? Nobody actively in play in the series, other than Tonks ever got a Patronus that changed. If you aren't going to use the possibility for anything why bring it up?)

Harry has collapsed from the Dementor's proximity, Ron and Hermione close in to guard him with their lives, when Fawkes himself suddenly appears, singing his head off, which distracts Voldemort from whatever he is doing. (Trying to find and take charge of Pettigrew's wand, probably.) Snape, seeing that the scar is now gone, turns on Voldemort and sends him through the Veil. Fawkes finishes his song and lands on Snape's shoulder.

By the time Harry wakes up, Snape is reinstated with the Order and with Aberforth to vouch for him and some Pensieve evidence left by Albus, has been granted a full pardon. There is even some kind of a half convincing reason for why Dumbledore thought it would be necessary for Harry to hate Snape. Because even allowing for the fact that in Year 1 Snape knew he was under observation by QuirrellMort, Snape certainly went out of his way to go on making sure that Harry would continue to do so.

And Harry is left just having to deal.

Did I seriously think it was going to go this way? No. But the extrapolation hit all the high points.

And I still thought that the final showdown might be in the room of the Veil.



### Item 4: Priori Incantatum

## Endgame: Possibilities

Quite a few fans were convinced that we might get another Priori Incantatum situation at some point before the end of the series. Considering the importance of the first one, in GoF it would not have been astonishing to get a reprise. Although to be frank, another Priori Incantatum probably wouldn't be much help with anything. The first one made for a splashy visual effect, but the wand's "log" seems to have skipped right over the curse that rebounded, so we got no actual information towards solving our underlying problem regarding the Harry-cruX from it. Although the distraction it provided served to delay matters long enough for Harry to get some other information that was of use, at the time.

But upon consideration, the whole device really made very little sense. Those allegedly weren't ghosts, they were echoes, they weren't the "real" people. And there is also no satisfactory explanation as to how they would have known about the round-trip portkey. I'd have said Rowling was being completely muzzy-minded on that one, except that there might yet be some explanation lurking in the background to be unveiled in the final book. (ETA: as if.)

Even the order that the echoes of Harry's parents showed up was initially backwards, and several editions had been printed before JKR corrected it. (My copy of GoF HB has James appearing before Lily. The pb has this corrected.) In all, it was a flashy, clumsy, confusing piece of business which I really didn't think had been properly thought through. I would have been just as glad not to see it return.

My very earliest solution to the problem of getting rid of Voldemort without directly killing him would have been to hit



## Endgame: Possibilities

him with an Obliviate and then steer him through the Veil under his own power. If this was the way it went, once the Dementor takes off the scar, Snape (and Pettigrew?) could Obliviate Voldemort and hustle him through the Veil. It ought to work, too. But even I had to admit that it was a bit thin on the \*bang\* factor.

And none of this offered much opportunity for the spirit quest I had originally been convinced was on the menu, but by the end of HBP Rowling had removed or ignored a lot of the reason I'd been expecting a spirit quest in the first place.



### Item 5: Final Confrontation

So, okay let's give that final confrontation scenario a bit more examination, shall we? New improved version. [Snippets of this and the following segment have been repeated in the second part of the Exeunt Albus essays, but not all of it.] And from our first look at the cover illos of the mass market edition of the final book (which were made public before the book was actually released) it really looked as if it wasn't going to happen this way at all.

This particular version takes the Wand Horcrux option, and concentrates on the Book 7 = Book 3 parallel. I thought it might turn out to be pretty far off-base. It was still one of my favorites. But the official cover illo didn't support it.

After Harry settled the Locket and the Cup, and may have figured out the scar, he and his friends wind up under attack by Voldemort. Long before they are ready for it.

Pettigrew will be a part of the ambush. Snape will be as well. The more I considered it, the more certain I was that we could

## Endgame: Possibilities

count on Snape being in at the death however the final confrontation played out.

I was no longer so convinced of the location. It could even be at Hogwarts. But that locked door in the DoM was still nagging at me, as was the Hall of the Veil.

Perhaps the trio have taken a sidetrack to the DoM in a desperate mission to get the Locked Door open (or convince whoever has the keeping of the key to that door to use it) and vanquish the wall-to-wall Dementors.

They've either got two more of the Horcruxes down, and no idea where to look for the last two. Or, they may have no idea where to look for #5 and no idea what to do about #6, which they have already figured out. But the Dementor situation has reached a point that unless it can be addressed, they aren't going to be able to continue to hunt out and/or deal with the last two Horcruxes.

I'd prefer that they get the door open first, Thereby taking out the worst of Voldemort's current allies. By that point the Giants may already have been bought off, or fought off, or just decided; "well bugger this for a lark" and gone home in disgust, and the werewolves may have been neutralized as well (not that Rowling had ever managed to convince me that the werewolves had ever been of the slightest use to anyone). There were only about 3 dozen DEs by the end of HBP. And there's no telling who — apart from Voldemort and Harry — know where he's stashed the Inferi.

Anyhow, Voldemort ambushes them.

Somewhere in the "Yo' Mama!" stage of the confrontation, Pettigrew would be goaded into grabbing Voldemort's wand



## Endgame: Possibilities

and crushing it, the way we saw him crush a twig into powder back in GoF, to get back at the way he has been used, and (as an afterthought) to pay off his debt to Harry. This is Pettigrew's little blaze of glory. A protective curse on the wand Horcrux will zap him right out of the picture, giving him a default hero's death for real.

However, Voldemort, disarmed, is not all that much less dangerous than Voldemort armed. His nastiest abilities don't require a wand. And he's already learned that trying to possess Harry doesn't work the way it's supposed to.

This time he goes for Ron.

To force another hostage situation.

And Ron has no defense against it.

• • • •

We don't know what becomes of Voldemort's current body when he has taken possession of somebody else's. Harry was in no condition to observe when Voldemort tried it before, with him, and Dumbledore didn't bother to explain it.

It is possible that the trio will have already discovered an "exorcism" spell in the course of dealing with the Horcruxes, and have held back from turning it on Harry because they have figured out that it is only by his harboring one of the soul fragments that makes it possible for him to deal with the other Horcruxes, and, until this point, they've known that there was still another one of them out there to have to deal with.

And, like I say above; we have every reason to believe that the general principle of exorcism exists in the Potterverse. We heard the matter being discussed in relation to Peeves all the

## Endgame: Possibilities

way back in PS/SS.

Hermione could certainly throw the exorcism spell at Ron. For that matter, she could throw it at Harry and finally get him clear of fragment #6, which in Voldemort's immediate proximity will, as usual, be giving Harry a lot of trouble. But she will only be given one shot at either, and this is the kind of nightmare choice which might cause her to freeze.

Plus, of course, Voldemort/Ron is armed and exceedingly dangerous. And Harry is half disabled from the usual Voldemort-proximity headache. Hermione may have all she can do just to defend herself.

But, as we all realized by then, the story isn't just about the kids.

Somewhere in the altercation somebody (can you say "Snape"? There, I was sure you could) will throw a well-aimed slicing hex or, more likely, a nicely calibrated Sectumsempra at Harry's scar, releasing the soul fragment embedded in his skull beneath it. This would carry the advantage of — right up to the final moment — concealing the fact that Snape is not really on Voldemort's side. To everyone present, it would look like an attack on Harry.

But if Harry — who is already going to be half-disabled by the usual headache — manages to retain consciousness, (and getting the fragment out of his skull may clear his mind, even if he does have his forehead sliced open and blood running down his face into his eyes) he may be the one to destroy the (vacant?) simulacrum which was designed to house the 7th fragment, and which his blood helped to create. If the rest of the fragments have now all been canceled, this may drag the 7th through the veil after the others, will-he or nil-he, which



## Endgame: Possibilities

would release Ron.

And, if not, he and/or Hermione may finally get the chance to use the exorcism spell, which finally does the trick.

And most of this could all still happen even if the confrontation doesn't take place in the room of the Veil. Although in that case they would definitely need the exorcism spell to get Tom to turn Ron loose.

But like I say, I hadn't much expectation of this one.



### Item 6: Book 3 Revisited (Yes, Again)

This next segment is also repeated, in essence, in one of the essays concerning the murder of Albus Dumbledore. But it builds upon the arguments which have been raised in a number of the points above. So I am not deleting it here. It also relates to the Book 7 = Book 3 interpretation which I honestly thought was driving the pattern of the last three books in the series.

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 in which Harry discovers his true "Patron," his protector, and it turns out to be himself.

But the thing that really connects with the reader, the part of the book that sticks in the mind long after finishing it, isn't so much the epiphany by the lake, but the confrontation and revelations in the Shrieking Shack, earlier. The whole course of action of PoA led 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 is no way that Row-

## Endgame: Possibilities

ing is not going to give us a replay of the confrontation in the Shrieking Shack. It's just too major an element to omit.

....

I thought that all through HBP Rowling was moving furniture to get the stage set to throw us back into the same frame of mind that we had been in at the opening of PoA.

She had a much easier job of setting the scene in PoA. Back then she could arbitrarily introduce Sirius Black, who we'd only heard mentioned once in the whole series, as "the enemy" without a jot of background. Absolutely nobody questioned the assertion that Sirius Black was Harry's enemy from page 1. Any remaining background on the subject she gave us later, over the course of the book.

Black was the enemy; the first time he saw Sirius's picture, Harry thought that he looked just like a vampire; he was Voldemort's second-in-command, he had betrayed Harry and his parents to his Master, 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 of them came face to face Harry hated him more than he hated Voldemort.

Sound familiar, much?

If this is what she was up to — and I was confident that it was — it was 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 gone from being James Potter's "insepa-



## Endgame: Possibilities

nable” best friend to the official Ministry viewpoint of his being Voldemort’s 2nd-in-command without anyone ever having suspected a change in allegiance to make us suspicious. I mean, really, looked at logically, the Ministry’s claims made absolutely no sense, and, given the eavesdropping in the Three Broomsticks, it’s clear that not everyone in the wizarding world really bought their story, either. But none of *us* ever questioned it over the course of the book. We were nowhere near as aware of just how unreliable a narrator Rowling could be back then

But this time she had built up six whole books of apparent familiarity with the character that she was now shoving into the Sirius Black rôle, and while she might misdirect us all over the landscape she could not altogether make us forget that we’d been watching Snape for several years now.

She had hedged her bets by holding back information about him, and not really giving us much to work from in trying to interpret him. But we knew even less about Remus Lupin, and yet had far fewer suspicions of there being any mystery about him to solve.

If we were building towards 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 his character over the previous 5 books. By the opening of the last book, we were supposed to hate Snape as much as Harry did.

• • • •

And I suspected that over the course of Book 7 we would be given even more apparent reason to do so.



## Endgame: Possibilities

We would learn more of Snape’s history through the lens of a number of 3rd-parties’ current biases — now that they believed him to be a traitor, and a murderer, and Lord Voldemort’s second in command — and the surface reading of this information would not show in Snape’s favor.

We would almost certainly get some sort of equivalent to the Three Broomsticks eavesdropping scene with information that will sound very bad indeed, but like the discussion in the Three Broomsticks, will ultimately prove nothing but that people are determined to interpret what they see according to their biases. I suspected that whatever interaction Snape might have had with Lily Evans (if any) could finally surface during this sequence. As presented, it would not do Snape any credit. (ETA: Yup. The overheard fishing trip conversation of Ted Tonks and his companions. It was a far less convincing piece of work than eavesdropping on Fudge and the teachers in the Three Broomsticks had been.)

But, just to make a tentative prediction: I thought that despite Voldemort (who I suspect may be flitting in and out of sight as much as the Grim did in PoA — with entirely different motivations) and the hunt for the Horcruxes, and the probability that the story was going to be wall-to-wall with Dementors, I was also pretty much convinced that Snape’s role as a fugitive in Book 7 was going to take a central position. 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 the first time?

We learned that the enemy we’d been dodging all through





## Endgame: Possibilities

the book wasn't the enemy. He wasn't the traitor. He wasn't the one who betrayed Harry's parents. Or certainly not intentionally, although his actions contributed to that betrayal. And, all along, he had been trying to protect Harry, not kill him.

The real traitor had been someone else entirely, someone whom everyone had trusted. Someone everyone believed to have been foully murdered by Sirius — before multiple witnesses — long ago. And it was that murder which had made him a fugitive.

Sound familiar?

It should.

• • • •

Which finally convinced me that those of us older fans who for some years had been convinced that somehow Peter Pettigrew was going to prove to be monumentally significant to the resolution of the series may have been a bit off-target.

Oh, Peter would no doubt be awarded his little Gryffindor moment, and probably go out in a teeny blaze of glory. In any event, he was toast. But it wasn't Peter Pettigrew *himself* that was significant, it was his former *rôle*.

And in the final reckoning, Albus Dumbledore would be playing that rôle.

• • • •

I was trying to project the final conclusion of the story arc according to what I interpreted as an underlying pattern to the series as it had already played out to that point. And Snape being "Dumbledore's man" fit that pattern better than any other possible interpretation.

## Endgame: Possibilities

Indeed this was a major component of this particular pattern. If Snape was not on Dumbledore's side, it all fell apart. If Snape was not Dumbledore's man, then I had misinterpreted the whole pattern of the entire series.

So I had a good deal invested in this interpretation, and to that point Rowling hadn't given us anything to significantly contradict it.

I did realize that I might turn out to have been taking a scenic cruise down the Martian canals again, but I really was discerning a *pattern* there. And I saw far too many indications that the pattern *really was* there to be able to dismiss the "Snape is Dumbledore's man" component of the pattern any more than I could dismiss all of the indications that Harry was the 6th Horcrux.

The most prominent indication of the pattern that I was seeing at that moment was that — based upon the last two books and their echoes and reflections of the *first* two books — I WAS CONVINCED that we were being set up to watch Book 7 echo and reflect major elements, and indeed the primary thrust of PoA. And just about all of the events over the course of HBP had conspired to put Snape into the position of stepping directly into the rôle previously portrayed by Sirius Black. I mean, really, could anyone claim that Snape's position at the end of HBP, was significantly different from Black's position at the opening of PoA?

And yet the "great revelation" of PoA was that — all 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, long before.



## Endgame: Possibilities

I was confident that this pattern would repeat in Book 7.

Ergo: Snape was Dumbledore's man.

Dumbledore may be dead, but he was not gone.

Dumbledore had *deliberately* enabled the partial Prophecy to escape.



### Item 7: The Shrieking Shack

So, just for fun, let's literally bring back the Shack.

Although it had occurred to me that if the Shack itself *wasn't* on the menu, that house in Spinner's End would make an excellent stand-in. We might find ourselves paying a visit to Great Hangleton — or wherever Spinner's End is — after all. (Note: at this point we had never heard of Cokeworth apart from a passing mention early in PS/SS.)

It turns out to be remarkably easy to do a simple round of recasting and play the scene almost without change.

So.

Snape has been glimpsed briefly over the course of the book, crossing the trio's path at 2 or three points of the action. Once into the run-up to the climax, they encounter him a final time and get closer than they had before. He disapparates. The trio manage to follow, and they find themselves in the Shack, which is outside the Apparition barriers of Hogwarts. Snape basically lets them corner and disarm him, they have him down.

Harry of course is throwing accusations of everything Snape ever did to fit up him and his parents. Snape hears him out, agreeing with every point, very much playing the Sirius Black part. Harry is working himself up to kill him, as he had pre-

## Endgame: Possibilities

pared to kill Sirius (he's still never killed anyone but Quirrell-Mort before), when Fawkes shows up and sits on Snape's chest and won't budge.

And then Snape tells them that everything he did —

"Was done on my orders." Says ghostly!(or possibly Portrait!) Albus, from behind the trio.

Following this bombshell comes the big explanation that to deploy the Prophecy seemed the only way that they could trick Voldemort into setting up the conditions of his own destruction.

Because when the final reversal came, I was convinced that Albus would be there to share the blame. It would not be all about Snape, alone.

That seemed to be about the only way that Rowling would be able to keep Snape from walking away with the whole book. And it would be Harry's choice as to how to take this information that finally "revealed" to us what he is.

Oh, yeah, Harry would forgive them. Even though the decision to turn the Prophecy loose was wrong, and unworthy, and Albus and Severus *admit* that it was wrong and unworthy. By that time Harry would realize that the stakes were much higher than just himself and his parents. And he may also realize that Sirius Black had managed to bollix up everyone's careful plans.

And the decision to forgive will give him the insight and possibly whatever other information he would need in order to finally answer the riddle posed by Tom.



### Item 8: On the Deaths of Great Wizards

Or, perhaps not.



## Endgame: Possibilities

So I am back to the tangent that the LiveJournalist beta\_elf originally sent me off on. Just a couple more relevant points to get through and I will be addressing it.

The following is another piece which has also been repeated in the essay of 'Exeunt Albus: Showtime!' There's some additional expansion over there.

Since HBP came out I'd had time to think over a couple of other side issues that had occurred to me regarding the established traditions pertaining to the deaths of great wizards in literature and folklore.

Merlin, Gandalf, whoever; their official deaths all seem to have something in common.

They don't usually leave bodies.

Usually nobody actually sees them die. Or, not and have them *stay* dead, anyway.

Instead, they usually just disappear.

Typically in some manner shrouded in Mystery.

What strikes me as being most in character for the end, 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 —

— and then to slip away quietly without fanfare. Generally 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* be back.

Indeed, what would fit very well for Albus, or, more likely, Ghostly!Albus, would be for him to make his rather subtle per-

## Endgame: Possibilities

sonal farewells to individuals, in the course of circulating at some crowded, overblown Ministry wrap-up, and for Harry to lose sight of him, suddenly realize what he must have done, and race down into the Department of Mysteries too late to see anything but the Veil still fluttering in the wind of his passing.

And it occurs to me that this would also march very well with Rowling's established, preferred, structure for the conclusion of her books, too. I was not convinced that we wouldn't get something along those lines. No, not convinced at all.



### Item 9: So Close to the Dead

I'd also been giving more thought to the issue of that spirit quest.

Namely that we might end up getting one, after all.

After OotP I was absolutely convinced that we were going to get one. But I had been a good deal less certain of that since HBP came out.

It was still a long way from a sure thing. And if we did go there then I honestly didn't think that Rowling had done as solid a job of setting it up as she really needed to. She'd left the matter far too late to suddenly be introducing the whole concept now. At least with the Horcruxes, you could see, in retrospect, that she really had scattered legitimate clues pointing to them all the way through the series. I didn't see a lot of indication that wizards have ever traveled beyond the Veil and back in the series as it stood.

On the other hand, the Accio Quotes site had recently managed to unearth and post an interview from 2000 in which



## Endgame: Possibilities

Rowling made her famous “dead is dead” statement, and further went on to state that in the 7th book we would find out “just how close you can get to the dead”

The quote did sound a lot as if she could be referring to a Veil scenario. If your mind is geared for Veil scenarios, anyway. It certainly suggested that at least one of the significant players in the issue was likely to be someone who was already dead.

And the quote was made in 2000. Right after GoF came out. — which rather abruptly harks back to those hitherto unexplained “echoes” from the Priori Incantatum sequence of GoF, doesn’t it?

None of whom had ever manifested as ghosts (and Frank Bryce, as a Muggle, wouldn’t have been able to, according to Nearly Headless Nick). They had all passed beyond the Veil.

Well we had any number of candidates for potential revenants, didn’t we? But it was hard to believe that she could be talking about anyone other than Albus. With a certain strong secondary possibility of Lily.

However:

Despite the fact that I did draft out a possible scenario for a spirit quest, which now lives over in the ‘Redeeming the Potterverse’ essay, and a modified version of it is still taking up space in the ‘The Pachyderm in the Parlor’ essay, I was still not prepared to bet the farm on the chance that we were going to get a spirit quest before we could wrap up the problem of Tom Riddle.

But, neither was I going to find myself taken aback or even particularly surprised in the event that we did.

But I did now tend to suspect that all four of our “cardinal characters” were going to be present, in some form or other, at

## Endgame: Possibilities

the final confrontation.

And I finally recognized that we may all have been barking up the wrong tree with our expectations that any such spirit quest must, of course, be embarked upon through the Veil.

The Potterverse probably has more than one gateway into the spirit world.

And just which god is the Lord of openings? Of gateways? And who has stood as gatekeeper — throughout the \*whole bloody series\* — to the reading that there is \*more going on\* in this story than Harry ever realizes?

I thought we might need to explore yet another of those myriad possibilities.



### Item 10: Lessons Taught in a Shack (Yes, Again)

I contend that Sirius Black did not “redeem” himself at the end of PoA. He did not need to redeem himself. What he needed to do was to get to Harry and tell him the truth of who the Marauders all really were and what had actually happened all those years ago. He was the appointed Messenger. Harry needed that truth. Without it, the party would not have ever made it back to the castle with their souls intact. Sirius gave Harry the key to connect with James, and to have that epiphany by the lake which enabled him to produce a Patronus that would vanquish a hundred Dementors.

Until Harry had spoken with Sirius Black, James Potter was just a story. Now he was a person.

Sirius gave him another key as well, the following year. A key that failed.



## Endgame: Possibilities

Harry lost that second key by trying to use it to pry open the Locked door in the DoM. That door is not going to be pried open by any tricky, all-purpose, generic, pseudo-key. And I no longer believed that door could really be opened by any single “lone hero” either.

And, for the record, I didn’t think that Snape was going to redeem himself in DHs, either. I didn’t think that he was going to turn out to need to “redeem” himself any more than Sirius Black did in PoA.

But I also didn’t think that Harry was going to get that Locked door in the DoM open without him.

Even though he already had the proper key.



### Item 11: The Locked Door

Oh yes. He did.

When you stop and think about it, it’s obvious. Every bit as obvious as that the way to get Slytherin’s Locket open was to hiss “open up” at it in Parseltongue.

What, after all, is behind that door? And why will they need to get it open?

Why, to release the power to vanquish the Dementors, of course. It is fairly obvious that what is behind that door is something that mere Dementors cannot touch, and cannot ever conquer.

What vanquishes Dementors?

It abruptly seemed to me that what it would take to get that door open is the Patronus Charm.

And probably not just one of them, either. In fact that door may require that the need be great enough that at least two

## Endgame: Possibilities

enemies must lay aside their grievances and work in concert to get the damned door open.

PoA, after all wasn’t about redemption. It was about forgiveness.

— Which would FINALLY make sense of why it has always seemed to be so bloody necessary for Harry to hate Snape!

Because although it was clearly necessary for Snape to act like he hated Harry in Year 1 — given that he was being observed all year by the Dark Lord — it hasn’t made much sense that Harry should have to make a career of hating Snape, who has kept on saving his sorry arse for 5 years afterwards.

And Snape has colluded in keeping that particular pot boiling with little nudges and jabs and snotty remarks all along the way, and while Albus had always — right up to that scene in his office before he and Harry left on a Horcrux hunt — insisted that Harry always show the proper forms of respectful address toward Snape, he had never done zip to derail the general hate-fest between them, only reserving his statement that HE trusts Professor Snape — and never explained why.

Snape’s antipathy for Harry is not exactly feigned, either. That mutual hatred may be needed in order to be able to meet as enemies, and work in concert to get that door open.

And by the time the pair of them are standing before that locked door, if my interpretation of the Book 7 = Book 3 pattern is on target, Harry will have already pursued Snape to whatever location is going to stand in for the Shack, Snape will have revealed his great secret, and Harry will finally be prepared to trust Snape.

(Thank you beta\_elf.)



## Endgame: Possibilities



### Item 12: The Unlocked Door

Of course once he sees Snape's Patronus and recognizes it — which I agree, he probably will — and realizes just who has been helping him all through the Horcrux hunt, he will have to do a major bit of retrofitting of what he knows, and what he believes. But they'll have got the door open by then, and will first have to deal with what they've turned loose.

By then I was wondering whether being caught broadside by the Power That Is Not Named as it escapes might not turn out to be the point of departure of that spirit quest that had seemed to be so likely, on and off, since we all first read OotP. The embarkation point for that quest might not be the Veil after all. In the Potterverse, there are probably more ways in and out of the spirit realm than we'd been shown yet.

And the power to vanquish who knows how many Demen-tors would certainly be capable of knocking out a couple of wizards who were standing directly in its path. At least for a few hours. And if it knocks them into the spirit realm they would need to find their way out.

They would need to do it together, and they would be likely to meet people in there who have further information that they still need. And perhaps one or two of those may at least briefly accompany them outside of that realm.

After all, Albus came out and told us that those we love never really leave us. And I at that point was convinced that both Harry and Snape sincerely loved the old man.

Given that in the end it has always come down to Harry



## Endgame: Possibilities

facing Tom alone, before any help arrives, Snape and Harry might get separated at some point, each faced with their own tests and trials, and we would only be shown Harry's.

Harry and Snape might only come face to face after returning to the material world. And they might not necessarily do that at the same time.

Or, Rowling might, in defiance of all expectations, decide to turn tradition on its head and NOT demand that Harry face down his enemy and vanquish him entirely on his own, with only his own resources. If her message is that it is human attachments which make us human, Harry might need only to stop Voldemort, and hold him at bay until help arrives. He'd done it before. And help had always come.

But, in either case, Snape would probably reach the place of the final showdown at least in time to see the end for himself, and certainly in time to make an emergency intervention to restore Harry, when Tom was finally vanquished. If such an intervention was needed.

And, at the very end of the adventure, after Harry had passed all of his tests, Albus would also reveal himself; returning from some unknown place outside the laws of Time, if only briefly, to "Explain it All" for that one final wrap-up.

Or, perhaps, just a little bit sooner than that.

For I had begun to wonder whether, in the end, Tom would finally be forced to realize just what a fool he had been, and what folly piled upon folly he had committed, and the value of what he had thrown away. And whether that, in itself, might be what tilted the balance to Harry's victory. For we knew that Rowling was never going to allow *Tom* to win, and it was very





## Endgame: Possibilities

hard to believe that she really intended for Harry to actually kill him.

But, it did seem that he had to be brought to admit that he has been wrong.

I had even begun to wonder if, in the end, Albus would offer to accompany Tom through the Veil. Either in a typical last act of kindness, or possibly, just to make sure that he finally went.



### Item 13: Conclusion

I did, at any rate, confidently expect Snape to survive VoldWar II.

I mean, face it, Harry may or may not be forced to kill Lord Voldemort to get him settled, but he wasn't going to be gratuitously murdering Severus Snape. Even if he did manage to end up continuing to hate him. (Which I was inclined to doubt.)

And if Harry didn't kill him, I very much doubted that anyone else was going to get the chance to do it. After all, Snape was one of the four cardinal characters of the series. He was not going to be taken out of action by some random spear carrier.

No one other than Harry really had the literary authority to kill Snape. No, not even Tom. Tom didn't care enough about Snape to have the right to kill him.

No. I thought that Snape would certainly see Tom out.

But that didn't necessarily mean that he was going to stick around for happily ever after. He might have dedicated himself so completely to the "great work" to be unable to see anything meaningful beyond it.

It could well be Snape who willingly followed Albus through that Veil.



## Endgame: Possibilities

— Although, I don't know; I did think it might be rather fun if Snape were to end up riding Buckbeak off into the sunset never to be seen again.

*Hi-Yo Buckbeak! Away!*

("Who was that unmasked man?")

Oh. Well.

.....

### Addenda: October, 2021

A grouching session with a correspondent in the UK regarding the anticlimax that Harry's final showdown in the Great Hall with Tom blowing himself up had turned out to be, when the actual confrontation complete with Albus Dumbledore "explaining it all," had already upstaged it some chapters earlier, prompted me into another exercise in "moving furniture." Resulting in the following extrapolation.

One of the things that set us off was Rowling's quotes, from an interview before DHs came out which claimed that books 6 & 7 were supposed to be two halves of the same issue.

That certainly didn't match what I was getting out of those two books in the series. My correspondent responded that if you squint, you can just about say that books 6 & 7 are two halves of the problem posed by the Horcruxes.

Well, yeah, I suppose if you squint, 6 & 7 are all about the Horcruxes, Which is an entirely different story than the one she was telling us through books 1-5.

But it sure doesn't *\*read\** like two halves of the same story.

And she did everything she could think of to *\*keep\** us from reading it as two parts of the same story by suddenly burying the whole story in the stupid Hallows and Albus's foolishness of





## Endgame: Possibilities

100 years earlier.

We could have happily have done without the Hallows altogether. But I suspect Rowling thinks that it's only fantasy if there is a fabulous magical artifact somewhere in the middle of it. Or leaping out of nowhere to solve the whole problem.

My correspondent was absolutely right that having Harry passively stand there and watch Tom blow himself up again was a completely unbelievable tag-on which in its way was every bit as unsatisfying as the epilogue. Particularly since the explanation she tries to give us for how it worked was so monumentally stupid and unconvincing.

But Rowling was in love with the scene of Harry being escorted through the forest by his beloved dead, to meet Tom and give himself up. And she couldn't see any way to keep *that* scene and destroy the last horcrux in the final climactic scene both.

Most of the fans did find the forest escort moving, but a lot of them were *really* disturbed and rather offended by the way all four of the escorts were acting like "Death's cheering squad" during it. (My own take on that, is that *anyone* who is called back via the Resurrection Stone is probably going to talk like that. Why should *they* be afraid of Death?)

But, if we *could* have dropped that scene, she might then have had to have actually *written something* about a vast magical battle (which she did *everything* she could to avoid, and I can hardly blame her for that, because the whole concept is *completely* unworkable.) with Neville's slaying the snake as climax 1.

Quite possibly in the Great Hall, after Tom and at least a few of his lieutenants manage to force their way into the castle.

So. Okay, let's avoid having to write a completely implausible

## Endgame: Possibilities

magical battle, by following Harry into the Pensieve — as we did. Have him kicked out of it just in time to hear the noise of Tom and some lieutenants smashing the main doors open.

Harry gets down from the Headmaster's office just in time to watch Neville kill the snake, and to distract Tom from murdering Neville by offering him the target he's been *really* wanting for the past 16 years.

Tom curses Harry and throws them both into the Celestial King's Cross station, pretty much as in canon.

And *that's* when the beloved dead turn up with pep talks. Albus eventually wanders in and tells Harry that he has the choice of going back. You can't kill two separate entities with one AK. The rest of the team tells him that it's fine, they'll still be there, they don't mind waiting.

And he returns to Hogwarts.

Tom doesn't.

When Harry regains consciousness, Tom stops breathing.

People might still do a bit of puzzling as to why, but it's less of a conundrum than trying to explain how an "unblockable" death curse managed to reflect off of another \*spell\*, which hasn't ever even been described as a shield spell. And avoids the codswallop of the hawthorn wand altogether.





## Second Guessing

This piece was also written before the final book in the Harry Potter series was released.

It would have been pointless to update it afterwards. It does serve as an example of the kind of considerations that people were making in anticipation.

There is a *bit* of an addenda which was added after the final book came out though.



**T**his piece is a bit of an exception since the whole point of it was NOT to update it in recognition of the final volume of the series after we finally had it.

And it looks like Rowling decided to bail out of the pattern she appeared to be working up to, in any case, so my whole premise was shot full of holes.

In point of fact, I was VERY late to make the jump onto this particular bandwagon. The idea was certainly not original with me. Like I say; I think I'm reasonably sharp, but I'm not always particularly swift. Still, once considered, the premise looked convincing. Particularly after a close look at the events of OotP.

In the run-up to the release of HBP there was a great deal of discussion and speculation over there being some connection between Chamber of Secrets and the impending Half-Blood Prince. It was Rowling who had drawn attention to this possible connection, although she assured us that nothing of HBP's story had remained in the final version of CoS.

She had claimed that when she was still drafting out the entire series, she did allegedly have both books in mind when she wrote CoS; she even claimed that the HBP title was once

## Second Guessing

considered for Book 2. Admittedly this was information given us in an interview, so she might have just been having us on.

Well, it eventually began to look like quite a few of the fans believed that they had managed to figure out the solution to that particular puzzle. Particularly given that JKR had been waving a possible answer under our noses for the previous two years.

You don't follow me? Okay, here is a list of some of the main plot elements from an existing book in the series. Some of these elements, like the fact that the final run-up to the ending always involves an underground passage, chamber, or some form of maze or labyrinth had shown up in every single book so far. But the ones listed here are all from one *particular* book. And they take place more or less in this order.



- 1 There is a memorable incident concerning magic that involves Dudley
- 2 Soon afterward the Dursleys are being inundated with owls. Harry ends up locked in his room.
- 3 Harry is removed from the Dursleys' custody in the middle of the night. They apparently have nothing to say about the matter. Harry is ultimately introduced to a "whole new world" for which nothing he knows has really prepared him. Some weeks later he boards the Hogwarts Express.
- 4 The DADA teacher is utterly useless. (Also evil.) No one is ever stated as having learnt anything in the class.
- 5 Off in the background, Dumbledore is running an elaborate scam trying to lure Voldemort out of hiding.



## Second Guessing

- 6 The scam is wrapped around an artifact of great significance (or at least of great significance to Voldemort).
- 7 The artifact, under guard, has been carefully placed below ground in a maze/puzzle/labyrinth. There is a trick to getting hold of it. Harry ends up being about the only person who qualifies to do so.
- 8 Harry and his friends have no idea what is really going on regarding Dumbledore's scam, apart from the fact that something is going on. They are being purposely kept in the dark and repeatedly told to leave it alone.
- 9 Snape gets into a heavy confrontation with a person who dies in the final show-down.
- 10 Harry is inadvertently given a piece of critical information just before Christmas.
- 11 Around Christmas Harry makes a crucial discovery (Ron is also involved in this) and Dumbledore, who to this point has been rather a distant figure, steps forward and he and Harry have a significant encounter in which vital information is transmitted.
- 12 Hagrid turns up with a dangerous creature that he can't really control, and which puts him, personally, in an unnecessary state of risk.
- 13 He dumps the final dealing with this creature on Harry and his friends. This entails a breaking of school rules.
- 14 At the last moment, at the end of the year, Harry, who has hold of the wrong end of the stick, is convinced that he has to mount a rescue effort.
- 15 He doesn't do it alone. His friends accompany him.



## Second Guessing

- 16 The artifact that Dumbledore's current scam is wrapped around is at the destination point of this effort.
  - 17 Obstacles which Harry must traverse before he can get to the "rescue" site include monsters from Greek mythology, tangled plant life, flying, a dangerously oversized humanoid (who is not actually a threat by that point), and problems requiring strategy and logic.
  - 18 Ron is taken out of the equation in an attack involving the head/brain.
  - 19 Hermione performs well to a point and after that point is simply unavailable.
  - 20 When Harry gets to the "rescue" rendezvous, he comes face to face with Voldemort's agent.
  - 21 Harry gets possession of the artifact anyway, right under the enemy's nose, and refuses to give it up. (The whole exercise was probably a mistake, since the artifact was safer where it was.)
  - 22 Voldemort reveals himself, reads Harry's mind.
  - 23 Harry is attacked. Somebody is killed in the fracas, Harry has legitimate reason to feel responsibility for the death, although he did not set out to kill anyone.
  - 24 Dumbledore manages to rescue Harry, Voldemort escapes.
  - 25 General debriefing between Dumbledore and Harry. The question of why Voldemort wants Harry dead is raised.
- Order of the Phoenix, right?





## Second Guessing

Well, yes. But like I said, Rowling *reuses* elements. These elements were all used, every one of them, in that order, all in one particular book. It's not a collection drawn from several different books, even though some of these elements have been reused in several of them.

However, the book I had in mind was *Philosopher's Stone/Sorcerer's Stone*.

OotP was a retread of the same underlying story as Book 1.

And, for that matter, I think if someone did a reread of OotP specifically with this kind of thing in mind, they might find some more examples of adaptive reuse that I have missed. Rowling appears to have definitely and quite deliberately recycled elements from PS/SS in OotP. She's certainly reused the basic situation, hell, she has reused the whole damned plotline!

And yes, quite a few of these elements have been used more than once in other books over the course of the series. But once you give the matter any kind of serious examination, Book 5 is definitely "The Return of the Scam."

Which first led me to wonder whether the suspected connection between CoS and HBP was that HBP would turn out to be a similar CoS redux, rerunning the underlying plot, even though it retains none of CoS's basic story. And for that matter, it led me to go on to wonder whether Book 7 would be a replay of PoA.



And it turned out that insofar as my suspicions about HBP went, in the main, I was right. But I was also completely wrong, as well. HBP definitely does not reuse the plotline of CoS.

I'd thought that perhaps the elements to watch for in Book 6

## Second Guessing

were going to be things like:

### Original Speculations taken from Book 2:

In CoS Harry had difficulties getting to Hogwarts at all. He did not travel there by the Hogwarts Express. Someone was determined to "help" him by getting in the way.

By the middle of the Autumn term (i.e., Halloween) there was an unidentified enemy known to be inside the castle picking victims off one by one, or two by two, and the fact that Harry was a Parselmouth turned out to be relevant. There was yet another case of "possession" involved. The person actually conducting the attacks — a person solidly in the least likely suspect category — was not attacking people of their own volition. The people attacked were, in some of the cases, people who stood between the person conducting the attacks, and Harry.

Hermione was taken out of the equation immediately after she solved the puzzle, and Harry was cut off from Ron's help at the last minute by a cave-in. Draco Malfoy was in possession of some useful information but was irrelevant in himself.

His father, on the other hand, instigated the whole plot. In Book 2, Lucius Malfoy's plot was brought to ruin by subversive action behind the enemy lines, orchestrated by a servant whose own agenda Lucius Malfoy neither knew nor cared about, and who, moreover Malfoy had a history of subjecting to abuse of the variety that demands self-mutilation in the name of obedience, and a victim who, despite being highly magical in his own right, Malfoy had consistently underestimated. (Query: who have we been consistently led to underestimate from the moment his name first came up in the series? No, I don't mean Lily. Although that applied to her, too.)



## Second Guessing

Hagrid sent Harry and Co. off on a dangerous wild goose chase through the Forbidden Forest. Although at least some useful information came out of the adventure. A charmed, at least partially-sentient, object was instrumental in getting them out of that situation. Critical information was provided at the last moment by a ghost.

Lightweight Lockhart turned out to be unexpectedly dangerous, although he was not the primary villain of the piece. And he was only neutralized by chance, by his own actions, in a classic bit of poetic justice.

And, furthermore, both Hagrid and Dumbledore had already been removed from the school by the time the climax was upon us.

Harry mounted a rescue attempt at the last moment, this time one that was both necessary and successful. It was the person responsible for the attacks who was in need of rescue. Fawkes was instrumental in the resolution of the climax.

The underlying puzzle was grounded in a legend dating from the Founders' days and an ancient artifact also of some significance to the earliest days of the Founders abruptly resurfaced when required. Another at least partially-sentient object; history's only largely "disinterested witness" of the entire period of the School's existence, took an active part in the resolution.

The servant is liberated, the chief plotter is forced out his established position of power, and removed from his sphere of influence. His traditional "allies" were glad to see him go, since he had made the mistake of threatening to curse their families.

Dumbledore was forced to go back on his word in the interest of fairness and we ended up learning a bit about Tom Riddle's background.

## Second Guessing

Not much of which actually was carried over to HBP. Or certainly not in its original form.

### Book 2: Actual Repeated Elements

And yet, when you go over HBP invoking metaphor and parallels, rather a lot of the observed elements and incidents in CoS did manage to produce apparent echoes in Book 6.

But, like I say, I was right, AND I was wrong. HBP was not a simple CoS redux. Rowling did not replay any of the story of CoS in the telling of HBP.

She did however, reuse an *amazing* number of the same "decorative elements" that were deployed as set dressing, or individual plot points in CoS over the course of HBP. In fact quite a startling number of them. Even if just about none of them ended up meaning quite the same thing as they had the first time around. We also got at least one "ringer" among them as well. Possibly more than one.

There was also a pronounced level of *spider* imagery and spider references throughout the narrative of HBP; from "Spinners' End," to the image of Slughorn sitting like a spider in the middle of his web, the return and final departure of Aragog and any number of other passing references to spiders or webs. This seemed greatly in excess of the references to spiders in CoS. (Although Book 2 is where both Aragog himself, and Ron's phobia of spiders were first introduced.)

And, as promised, herein is a list of some of them. As in the above list, rather a lot of these have been used in other installments of the series as well. I also suspect that with more time I'd be finding a few more of these that I missed.

- 1 In both Book 2 and Book 6 it is beginning to look very



## Second Guessing

much as if the whole central issue was precipitated by Lucius Malfoy's foolish and self-serving decision to deploy the Riddle Diary, without permission.

- 2 A House Elf who despises his Master shows up and pitches a fit.
- 3 Harry is removed from Privet Drive in the middle of the night, to an unfamiliar destination. He ultimately ends up spending the rest of the summer with the Weasleys.
- 4 Harry meets this year's new teacher before the school year starts. New teacher is determined to strike up an association with Harry.
- 5 New teacher is a celebrity hound with a flair for the dramatic, an ostentatious wardrobe, a weakness for boasting, and keeps drawing attention to Harry in his class throughout the year.
- 6 Hagrid encounters Harry in Diagon Alley.
- 7 Malfoy is in Diagon Alley the same day as the trio, in company with one of his parents.
- 8 An altercation with the Malfoys occurs in a Diagon Alley shop. One of the Malfoys provokes it by making nasty, uncalled-for comments related to Hermione's parentage. Ill-breeding is displayed by all parties in the confrontation.
- 9 We pay another visit to Borgin & Burke's. The same black lacquer cabinet that Harry hid in in CoS is a centerpiece. The same cursed opal necklace (i.e., Chekhov's necklace) is again pointed out to our attention.
- 10 We spy on the Slytherins in their own territory. Malfoy drops heavy hints about helping the Dark Lord.



## Second Guessing

- 11 Harry is prevented from getting into Hogwarts on his own. This time we know Malfoy is responsible.
- 12 Harry arrives at Hogwarts late, and the first staff member to meet him is Snape, who is characteristically unpleasant.
- 13 One of the first new student characters we meet is a member of the "upper crust," with comments regarding the new teacher.
- 14 Someone is presented with a used book, and develops an emotional attachment to the previous owner. ("A friend that I can carry in my pocket!") Neither the book nor the previous owner are what anyone could call harmless.
- 15 The book dates from something in the neighborhood of 50 years ago. This is the aforementioned "ringer." We are *supposed* to recognize the echo. But the book's date doesn't actually relate to anything actively deployed in the text and certainly does not relate to Riddle, or the Riddle era at Hogwarts. (Close, but no cigar!)
- 16 Someone spends much of the year pulling a Lockhart (taking credit for someone else's work)
- 17 Hermione blatantly breaks rules to advance a personal agenda.
- 18 Hermione attracts the attention of the new teacher. She is very pleased to have it.
- 19 The new teacher sets up a club. Everyone in Gryffindor seems to be interested in it.
- 20 Much attention gets focused upon a complex Potion. This Potion is later used to acquire information.





## Second Guessing

- 21 How many people remember that our very first introduction to how a Pensieve works was in CoS? Yes, that's right. Riddle incorporated the function of a Pensieve into the Diary.
- 22 Harry accesses some valuable information through the unconscious use of Parseltongue.
- 23 Partway through the first term of the year we are introduced to a complete sad sack of a girl who is bullied, put-upon, and fundamental to the underlying problem. This "born victim's" own conduct is anything but exemplary.
- 24 A member of the Slytherin family is described as elderly and "monkey-like." (His son spends his spare time in trees. Query: are we supposed to now be wondering whether "Slytherin" is some highfalutin attempt at a variant on "simian"? ["We are DEVO!"])
- 25 Mysterious attacks are made upon students. With more good luck than good management these attacks are non-fatal, but the victims spend a variously extended time out of commission. (The earlier the attack, the longer the time out of commission.)
- 26 Molly and Arthur Weasley rush to the school in response to an attack on one of their children.
- 27 We first encounter Tom Riddle himself in chapter 13. The two chapter titles are deliberate echoes of one another.
- 28 We spend quality time in Herbology wrangling with dangerous plants.
- 29 The newest teacher on Staff throws a Holiday party.
- 30 A correctly brewed Potion goes badly wrong, leading



## Second Guessing

- to long term adverse effects upon one of the trio.
- 31 Harry is injured at Quidditch and spends the night in the Hospital Wing. Dobby shows up in the night, unexpectedly.
- 32 Somewhere in the Castle there is a room that no one can find. Or, if find, open. In the climax of the story a monster gains access to the school through this uncharted space.
- 33 Polyjuice espionage with Crabbe and Goyle. 'Nuff said.
- 34 We finally acquire the key to the mystery *du jour* immediately following an encounter involving Aragog. This key leads us directly to information concerning pivotal actions of young Tom Riddle's when he was still a student at the school.
- 35 A significant discovery takes place in a bathroom. Myrtle is present.
- 36 Harry and Draco get into a duel which is brought to a shattering end by one of them using a spell which originally came from Severus Snape. There are publicly unpleasant consequences from this conflict for Harry.
- 37 We first encountered the Vanishing Cabinet in CoS. At that point, Peeves broke it at Nearly Headless Nick's urging, in order to keep Harry from getting a detention from Filch for tracking mud into the Castle. Someone had put it physically back together again, although it seems to have taken Malfoy some months to repair the spells on it.
- 38 Snape himself gets surprisingly little page time during most of the year. We see him at the beginning and the end of the book, but only get a glimpse or two in the





## Second Guessing

middle, mostly through report.

- 39 He does contribute his efforts to at least one medical crisis, however.
- 40 Dumbledore leaves the school before the climax of the story, this absence is connected with the actions of one of the Malfoys. He returns only when the final confrontation is upon everyone.
- 41 Leading to a confrontation between the Malfoy involved and Albus.
- 42 The climax of the tale involves a visit to a grand, perilous, ancient chamber, underground, which cannot be accessed except by complying to specific conditions, and is associated with a Slytherin.
- 43 Someone significant to Harry nearly dies there. [In CoS, Harry was forced to kill something there.]
- 44 An artifact of some significance is brought out of this chamber. Upon examination, there turns out to be either something more, or something different to the artifact than was first assumed.
- 45 A decent person is discovered to have been acting under an enemy's control over the past year.
- 46 A Malfoy's close connection with the school appears to be brought to an end.
- 47 Somebody gets thrown off a staircase.
- 48 The climax and/or its aftermath is accompanied by Phoenix Song.
- 49 The school Governors are invoked.
- 50 Exams are canceled.



## Second Guessing

I rather suspect that there may be more of these, but I will leave those to someone else to dig out. With one exception:

- 51 ETA 2024: Does it occur to anyone else that Tom's blowing himself up by attempting to use the Elder wand against Harry looks *suspiciously* similar to Gilderoy Lockhart's wiping himself out by trying to use Ron's defective wand against Ron and Harry?



Well that was enough to confirm the hypothesis for me. I thought I had ample reason to feel justified in my confidence of expecting Book 7 to reflect and echo at least *some* elements of Book 3. We just did not know *which* elements.

So long as we are at it, let's consider Book 7, and think back to Book 3:

### Book 3: Looking Ahead

Things that actually happened, or elements that were present in PoA:

The Weasleys were out of the country for the summer to spend time with Bill.

Harry leaves the Dursleys under his own steam and strikes out on his own. This takes place after a family confrontation in which Harry states that he's had enough. His departure is witnessed by an Animagus who has a major role in the year's action.

Much of the characters' attention throughout the year is concentrated upon the whereabouts and motivations of a convicted murderer. (Although it later turns out that the criminal wasn't ever brought to trial and was convicted primarily by official Ministry spin on public opinion.)





## Second Guessing

Everybody is absolutely sure that they already know who this enemy is, where his loyalties lay, and what he wants (and they are wrong on all counts).

This supposed enemy was a fugitive from page 1.

The enemy had abilities known only to a few, one of whom was present in the school that year and who continued to suppress the information until it was dragged out of him at the last minute. Snape was at loggerheads with that person from the outset.

The Dementors were an overriding factor throughout the entire book and it was made clear that they absolutely could not be trusted to restrain themselves around Harry.

The trio was at odds with each other for three-quarters of the year. Hagrid's monumental fecklessness provided cause for yet another major distraction from the central issue throughout much of the school year.

Harry was sent an anonymous gift which could have been dangerously hexed. Hermione's guess as to who had sent it was absolutely correct.

Crookshanks had a paw in most of the proceedings related to the fugitive.

Harry's physical resemblance to James served a major plot point (!)

Ron was taken out of the equation fairly early in the climax and Hermione's assistance and guidance was necessary to actually pull the final mission off.

Dumbledore set the final mission up, but took no active part in it.

Much of the situation hinged upon the fact that the roots for most of the motivations of everyone involved's actions were buried 20 years in the past.

## Second Guessing



### Some Possible Expectations based upon PoA:

Well everybody seemed to be debating who was most likely to die. I seriously doubted that the final book was going to be the bloodbath that the fans seemed to be panting for. But there were certainly going to be deaths. Tom Riddle's at the very least.

Leaving aside the two "bonus deaths" that Rowling claims slipped in when she wasn't looking, my own top candidates (on Harry's side) for at least a couple of the deaths that she already planned are as follows. Not all of them, by any means, but there is a decent argument to be made for each of them:

Sybill Trelawney — who I fairly confidently expected to blunder across the plotline again, spout a third Prophecy, and finally get taken out of the equation.

Horace Slughorn — killed for what he knows. Maybe he will have arranged for his information to get to the proper place in the event of his death. If not, something associated with him (another vial of Felix?) may turn up later in the course of the story and have everyone very antsy as to whether to trust it.

Aberforth Dumbledore — who by then we will know rather better and will probably regret at least as much as we did Cedric Diggory.

A "Creature," preferably magical. Probably either Crookshanks or Buckbeak — we got closure on Aragog in HBP, I think we may get closure on one of these in DHs. Ferenze is also a candidate who applies here, actually. We first encountered him going against the herd on Harry's behalf in PS/SS. It is not a great stretch to suspect that something in Book 7 may echo



## Second Guessing

back to Book 1, even if most of the pattern is repeating Book 3.

I didn't have any clear expectations about those two unplanned "bonus deaths," but another Order member seemed likely (Moody?). Since I doubted that the school would be open, or that Harry would be attending classes, I didn't think the bonus deaths will be any of the current students, but it is always a possibility. There is also the possibility that these deaths, or at least one of them may be on the opposing side. Or in the Ministry.

As to other matters:

A correspondent brought this one up; I had missed it. The Weasleys will be out of the country for part of the summer to be with Bill. Wedding arrangements are traditionally the bride's family's responsibility. The Delacours live in France.

While on this subject: we would almost certainly get some kind of incident at Bill and Fleur's wedding. It may or may not seem important at the time. There will probably be no Weasley family fatalities, but we may get another confrontation between the twins and Percy. Someone may get blown up *à la* Aunt Marge. Or there may be a DE attack on the event if Rowling decides to play it for action/drama rather than comedy.

And, speaking of Aunt Marge, somebody in the Dursley household — probably Petunia — will finally tell us something about Harry's parents. Or at least his mother. Harry won't like what he hears a bit. It may constitute the last straw and he will storm out earlier than scheduled.

The Deluxe edition cover design (U.S.) of the trio flying dragon-back may be their return from the continent. The Deluxe edition covers so far had depicted incidents that take place very

## Second Guessing

early in the story.

Over the course of the book, we're going to hear (or overhear) a lot of information about the Snape backstory and every bit of it will sound perfectly dreadful. Until the end of the book, that is, when we will look back and wonder why we ever thought that sounded so suspicious.

Animagi may turn out to be an issue again. Or some other form of shape-shifter. (Tonks? Will we finally find out why Rowling felt Metamorphmagi were important enough that she had to introduce one?)

Oh. Right. Somebody will lose much if not all of their ability to do magic due to grief or depression.

Somebody will turn out to have a new Patronus.

The Knight Bus will show up in the course of the story. Without Stan Shunpike. Or maybe the Ministry will finally release Stan Shunpike. Maybe Harry will have something to do with that.

I do think Harry might reasonably tell Scrimgeour that there is a sea cave full of Inferi somewhere along the coast, and let the Ministry do something legitimately worthwhile for a change, scouring it out. (If Fudge or the Ministry really does have a private army of heliopaths, they could come in quite useful, in fact.)

Harry and his friends may end up staying at the Leakey Cauldron for a while. Or possibly the Three Broomsticks. We will hope they are not forced to put up at the Hog's Head.

We'll encounter another Boggart?

Lupin will turn out to have some important information. Possibly regarding Lily. Harry will probably have to pry it out of him. Lupin may teach Harry a useful skill. Possibly the basic



## Second Guessing

principles of Occlumency. Finally.

Neville may make an appearance. But he won't be along for the whole show.

Something, either a creature, or a person, or a piece of information will keep crossing Harry's path. It will have a sinister reputation but not do anyone any direct harm.

If you squint around the edges of the narrative someone may appear to keep showing up in two places at once. The characters may eventually notice this as well. I doubt that every Tine-Turner in the world was smashed at the DoM.

Another one my correspondents mentioned that Harry might lose (as in have destroyed) one of the valued items which he has been given earlier in the series and replace it with something better.

If this is the case and he is limited to something he got two books ago that would bring us back to the 2-way mirror, which is already broken. He may find James's mirror, miraculously undamaged at Godric's Hollow. Although I can't really see that leading anywhere.

However, I think if he merely loses a valued item which he was given some years earlier, I think there is a good chance he will lose the Firebolt.

— And perhaps replace it with Sirius's motorcycle. Which could certainly come in handy. Hermione might agree to ride pillion on that. And Ron now has a broom of his own and can keep up. Hermione doesn't look to be particularly happy riding that dragon. Neither does Ron.

Harry may even be sent another valuable anonymous gift *à la* the Firebolt, one that is highly significant, and even more

## Second Guessing

highly suspect. This time it really might be booby-trapped. (But not necessarily.) The Hufflepuff Cup is a possibility. But I wouldn't get my hopes up that it will be that simple.

It has occurred to me that another prime candidate for "playing Firebolt" would be a vial of Felix Felicis. Suspicions of tampering will be particularly high if it should show up after Slughorn is presumed dead and his lab and possessions believed to have been ransacked by Death Eaters.

(I really do think that poor old Sluggy is a good candidate to be one of the "major characters" that now won't be making it through to the end of the series. But he is also an awfully good candidate for any sort of faked death, such as the one that many of us felt primed to expect in Book 7.)

Snape will probably make at least one very brief, surprise appearance, in person, in the middle of the book, and will be assumed to be threatening Harry. He will get away almost at once. May do some damage to the area. Harry will be unharmed.

There may be an ongoing quarrel between at least two of the Trio. The third may get roped into it. Hagrid may end up playing peacemaker again.

The trio will sneak into the school (rather than out of it). Possibly by way of the Honeydukes passage. The lacquer cabinet is another possibility.

The Marauders Map will either reveal, or spectacularly fail to reveal some critical information of just who is with them in the castle.

Crookshanks may do something notable (for a cat, or a Kneazle anyway).

There WILL be a redux of the Shrieking Shack confrontation.



## Second Guessing

At least in essence. It may not actually take place in the Shack. (Possible scenarios for this confrontation are explored in other essays of this collection.)

Wall-to-wall Dementors.

Unlike in PoA, I suspected that the school would remain closed for at least one term. It may also be under guard on the Ministry's authority. Necessitating the trio having to sneak in.

Hagrid may join Harry and his friends in their quest at some point. (They could certainly do worse for defenders.)

Conversely: Hagrid may get himself into some kind of a legal pickle, and will add that to the kids' responsibilities. Buckbeak is recognized?

Conversely, Snape may survive the final confrontation and escape, riding Buckbeak into the sunset, to pass into legend and neither of them ever be seen in wizarding Britain again.



## Book 7: Looking Back

Well.

Um.

Er... not really up to my usual 1 out of 3 standard, was I?

We did get the Shrieking Shack.

Unfortunately.

We even got the 3 Broomsticks eavesdropping scene. And in it were told something of Snape's presumably dastardly deeds, which were anything but. (Sending three naughty students off to serve a detention in the Forest with *Hagrid*, for goodness sake. Are you *serious*?) Followed almost immediately by one of the trio either peeling off from, or being ejected by, the other



## Second Guessing

two — essentially for being right about the situation they were in. And, ultimately, returning to the team with information. Or bad news, at least.

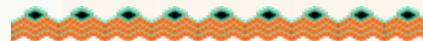
There were a few other points which sort of made an appearance. Harry did lose the Firebolt. He did ride the motorcycle, we did lose a magical creature, there was a disruption at the wedding, a piece of information with a sinister reputation did keep crossing our path, and no, it didn't do anyone any direct harm. The Hallows were much less useful than Albus built them up to be, and Harry didn't actually get physical possession of one of them until the shouting was over. And, frankly, the fact that Albus Dumbledore unwisely struck up a 2-month friendship with Gellert Grindelwald nearly 100 years earlier had no direct relevance *whatsoever* upon the situation with Tom Riddle. The trio snuck into the school, and the Dementors were back.

But I really cannot say that DHs bore much resemblance to PoA.

If anything, it bore a strong family resemblance to GoF. A long dreary slog punctuated by three prepared-for action sequences (Ministry break-in, Gringotts heist, and last stand at Hogwarts). With Ron bailing out again and an unexpected blow-up between the first two planned excursions. Although having to escape from Godric's Hollow and Malfoy Manor were much more difficult unexpected tasks than having to ask a girl to the Yule Ball.

Well. Okay. I have egg on my face.

I'm told it's good for the complexion.





## Regarding the Potterverse Part III

# Scorecard

Considerations and criticism of the series as a whole, written after the release of 'HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS.'



## The Battle of Hogwarts and Other Fakery

Well, I was certainly wrong about this prediction.

I thought we'd already HAD the Battle of Hogwarts. We didn't really need another.

But most of the following is representative of the conclusions I had drawn by the end of HBP. Well, yeah, okay, with a bit of minor post-DHs tweaking and grouching here and there.

To be honest, I wasn't sure that this piece really still served any real purpose to the collection at all, but it does at least still represent my take on the subject. Wrong or not.

But then I got to thinking of another issue which, upon reflection, comes across as a lot less "authentic" than it really ought.

I rather think we've been had.



**Q**uite frankly, by the time Rowling finally decided to throw another "Battle of Hogwarts" at us. I didn't believe one word of it. It was just too cheesy.

And, you will also notice that she didn't actually *show* us any such battle, either. Just some of the preparations, an arbitrary "time out," and a few glimpses of the aftermath. Any part of it that she actually made an effort to follow took place either around the edges, in the background, or during Tom's totally arbitrary time-out. One might as well have been waiting for an actual dance number to materialize in 'MOULIN ROUGE'.

I'd say Rowling didn't have a clue of what a wizarding battle looks like. Didn't *want* to write one. But had talked herself into being convinced that she *had* to have one. So she faked it.

Because it was *totally* fake.





## The Battle of Hogwarts and Other Fakery



I will also continue to maintain that Rowling's whole premise of a "wizarding war" was completely bogus from the get-go. That much had been obvious from early on.

How does any government conduct a war without an army? It's possible, obviously. People (terrorists, mostly) manage to do it every day of the week. And Fudge does admit that the Ministry regards Riddle and his followers as a bunch of terrorists. But the people who typically do that kind of thing use distinctly non-military methods, like car bombs or suicide bombers and hijacked airplanes, not troops arrayed on battlefields in a fine, Napoleonic panoply. By the end of the first chapter of HBP it was clear that the only plausible model for the conduct of this "war" was indeed something more on the order of Al Queda or the IRA than that it could be anything modeled — however remotely — on the history of the 3rd Reich. And you simply do not fight the IRA by lining up on one side of a meadow in front of a boarding school.

(Whoever it was who first made the statement that; "The Battle of Hastings was won upon the playing fields of Eton." certainly didn't mean it *literally*.)

The whole premise of this "war," and particularly of the final battle, was *incredibly* stupid once examined. Yes, certainly, evacuate the younger children and get them out of harm's way. That is a reasonable enough action to take. But then hunker down for a siege; don't throw open the doors and go racing out to engage the enemy. A castle is a fortified structure designed specifically for defense. Post someone on the towers to watch



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and see when you are being attacked, and from which direction, and don't let yourself get taken by surprise. While you're at it, watch the tunnels that the DEs know about from your end, too.

And for all that Voldemort was supposed to have an "army" of DEs (which comes down to about 3–5 dozen), and an "army" of Inferi (maybe 50–70? Not that it matters, he never recalled them from Horcrux guard duty — not even after he found out that the Horcrux he hid in that cave was gone), plus an undetermined number of Giants (which turned out to be all of 2) and werewolves (also an undetermined number, but because it wasn't even full moon, we have no idea how many of them were even there, apart from Greyback, so who cares?) and Dementors (also undetermined numbers, but certainly more than he started with).

As it turns out, all the DEs also called in their Imperiused puppets, which means that when it came right down to it, he also had the Ministry of Magic. Admittedly, we did not have any reason before Book 7 to expect *that*.

Of course the MoM has never been stated as having any kind of an army whatsoever, either. Not even an "army" of Aurors or Hit wizards. So what Voldemort's forces were actually fielding was an "army" of office schlubs.

I had, honestly, very much suspected that the much anticipated "Battle of Hogwarts" of a hundred thousand fanfics simply wasn't likely to happen. Or not the way it's usually been depicted.

And I still think that if I'd been right we might have had a more interesting wrap-up.





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However; until HBP came out it seemed like just about every fan author or theorist who heard the phrase “wizarding war” immediately flashed on every WWII image from any movie or TV show that they’d ever seen and started orchestrating the Battle of Hogwarts. I wouldn’t be surprised if the date of the defeat of the ever-so-obscure “Dark wizard Grindelwald” in 1945 (which at the end of the series makes as little sense as anything else Rowling threw at us in DHs) didn’t add its own subliminal kick to the whole phenomenon.

Back around when OotP came out, I already suspected that everyone who blindly followed that particular scenario was probably barking at the moon.

Of course at that point I also wouldn’t have been surprised if the Death Eaters got closed down before Voldemort did, too. Although by the end of the book it didn’t seem to be happening very quickly or very publicly. Obviously the other shoe on that issue hadn’t fallen yet. But I would no longer have been all that surprised if Rowling had chosen to confound expectations and simply turned out not to go anywhere near any “Battle of Hogwarts”

Of course, up to that point, I’d also held off from making a lot of actual predictions on the subject, and the ones I had stuck my neck out with were the kind that were as likely to be wrong as not. So I wasn’t too surprised to end up with egg on my face over this one.

But I still don’t put a lot of credibility in the Battle of Hogwarts. Even though we allegedly got one.



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By the eve of the publication of ‘HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE’ I had come to the conclusion that there was a good deal less to the “Threat of Voldemort” than first appeared. And this conclusion was solidly supported by the official Riddle backstory which we were given over the course of that book. I suspected that there probably had *always* been far less to that threat than public perception had always made it out to be. For all that the speaking of Voldemort’s (bogus!) title seems to drive everyone into a gibbering panic.

A threat was definitely still there, and as far as it went, it was very real. But it had been and was still being exaggerated by public perception. We’d had it pointed out to us from the onset of the series that the fear of a name gives extra power to the name’s holder. And yet we were never given any indication that Rowling had adopted the concept of any literal “power of true names” into her underpinnings of how magic works in the Potterverse to justify it.

So this whole booga-booga-mystic power of true names (which “Lord Voldemort” absolutely *isn’t*) just plain wasn’t necessarily something that could be depended upon. And the threat that Voldemort actually represented was nothing like the fanon version that we had become accustomed to over the previous nine years. Speaking Voldemort’s name had no effect in canon whatsoever for the whole first 6 books. Apart from freaking out people who had been brought up to regard that name as unmentionable.

(Which when you come right down to it is the kind of “fake scary” which works well enough when you’re playing at the kiddie end of the pool, but once the kids reach their mid-teens,



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flatly doesn't. That kind of scary is *always* about 90% pretend.)

Indeed when she finally did belatedly throw in some consequences for speaking the Dark Lord's name, it turned out to be an obviously cobbled together retrofit, purely for the purpose of enabling Harry to capture himself at the point that it was necessary to the plot for him to get inside Malfoy Manor. It was transparently contrived and totally hack-handed. And I, for one, wasn't accepting it. It was just too shoddy.

The real problem with Voldemort, as it had been presented in canon up to the opening of DHs (where Rowling evidently decided to throw the entire existing series out the window and write some other story instead) is that you can't easily GET RID of him. He's deathless. You can't just off him, or wait for him to die, and move on.



Think about it. Take the meta view. Here we were, six books into a series of seven. Voldemort is definitely going to last out to the climax of the 7th Book. But the only book remaining gives us too short a turn-around cycle to plausibly create and disperse the cliché "army of Death Eaters" that the standard Battle of Hogwarts scenario requires. And most of us really didn't think that Rowling was so irresponsible as to leave an "army" of underground DEs still roaming around at liberty, itching to cause trouble, even if the ww wasn't quite an earthly paradise by the time we bid good-bye to it on the final page. (And if she was following the example set by Elizabeth Goudge, whose work she had mentioned in interviews more than once, it might have been.) Or, at least not if she was throwing her plot

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together according to traditional expectations.

Although, upon second thought, considering that at the end of HBP Voldemort's "army" of human followers was down to about three dozen, she probably could have just left them dangling like the loose ends they all too obviously were. If, as I say, she decided to confound expectations.

Instead, what she did was to throw us a *fake* battle, and leave the Potterverse overrun with unaffiliated Dementors who answer to nobody. Really smooth, Ms Rowling.

Looked at impartially, the whole Death Eater "organization" was really in a stronger position, however rusty and in disarray, at the end of Book 4 than it was at the end of Book 5. And certainly than it was by the end of Book 6.

Voldemort made no lasting headway over the entire course of Book 5. And at the end of it he had lost the one major advantage that he had at the beginning of that period (the suppressed knowledge of his return). He had also lost a good 20%-25% of his manpower. The only things he got out of Year 5 are the probability that this was the period during which he had managed to reconnect with Greyback, and his agreement (I hesitate to call it a treaty) with the Giants.

By the end of the 6th book he had lost another handful of followers, one killed, three captured, four (counting Snape) publicly identified. (None of them any of the Azkaban escapees, so that brings the total number of his unsuspected undercover followers unmasked up to about ten.)

Harry only saw 3 of the 8 invaders escape. The three who got away had all been seen and at least two of them identified by name, so they've now been outed if they weren't before. His



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spy at Hogwarts's cover is blown, and his "dread ally" Fenrir Greyback, the pack leader of his "army" of werewolves, has also been captured. In addition, he has written off the Malfoys out of spite, which may have been a bit premature.

Despite Remus Lupin's curiously inflated statement about the Order having been outnumbered 20 to 1 "last time" that statement, on the face of it, just doesn't hold water.

If you count all of Voldemort's total forces, it might *about* pass muster, but all of his "forces" are not Death Eaters. Consider: Harry Potter saw just about EVERY Death Eater who was alive and at liberty on June 24, 1995 show up for the general muster in the cemetery at Little Hangleton.

There were about 40 of them. And Voldemort clearly didn't expect there to be significantly more.

There were also the famous 3 no-shows, and, at that point, another 10 still in Azkaban. That's *all* the actual Death Eaters there were. Faced off against what, six weeks later, were estimated to be a couple of dozen Order members. That looks far more like the 5:2 odds that took down the Prewett brothers than any 20 to 1, and it's a far more plausible estimate. And, for all of the fears expressed by various Order members, I really doubt Tom signed up many (or any) new recruits over Year 5. Or year 6, either. Apart from, perhaps, Stan Shunpike.

I wasn't even altogether convinced he actually signed up Draco Malfoy. The kid couldn't even Apparate yet, and Tom didn't intend for him to live long enough to get a license, so there wasn't much point in installing the universal summoning device on his arm, and in his case Old Lord V was more likely to get better response by the use of the carrot as well as

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the stick. The mission of killing Dumbledore was probably supposed to be both payback for his father's "failure" and the price of his induction into the circle. Plus, having assigned him such a pack of loose cannons and incompetents for "backup" I am inclined to agree with Albus that I don't think Voldemort ever intended the boy to succeed. The whole invasion component of that mission was more likely a double-cross wherein Malfoy would throw open the gates to his own executioners. It was only Snape's Unbreakable Vow that saved his skin. Voldemort wasn't quite willing to dispense with Snape yet.



At the end of fifth year, half of the Azkaban escapees had been recaptured, and Tom had had about 6, of his "outside" operators unmasked (Crabbe, Goyle, Malfoy, Nott, McNair and Avery), and his return was now public knowledge. Hardly an advance in the long run.

Well, yes, the Dementors had already left Azkaban, and these new inmates would probably be out again before the end of the series, but while escapees can conduct or take part in raids, they are not typically able to move about freely or openly in society, and they certainly cannot engage in espionage inside the Ministry, or manage the suborning of Ministry personnel the way they did over Year 5.

(And I flatly do not believe that they simply waltzed into Ministry positions as heads of departments between the beginning of August and the end of September as Rowling tried to claim in DHs. That is a level of fake plotting which is too lazy to be allowed.)



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Admittedly, Voldemort may have had other supporters, but, by the end of HBP how many of those would be willing to stick their necks out now that they knew the odds? Probably no more than could be bullied into participating.

Plus, we are supposed to assume, any number of Imperioed puppets. I suspected that with the exception of the Goblins, who might still go either way, Voldemort was going to be limited to doing whatever he did with the forces that he had at that moment. Which was quite bad enough. After all, he *did* have the Dementors.

Indeed, at the end of HBP he could probably have handed all of his current allies over to the Dementors, lock, stock, and barrel, and carried on with only them, and it would still be hard enough to stop him.



Or so I thought at the time. Clearly I was reckoning without the (frankly unbelievable) fall of the Ministry and Voldemort's puppet government. But, as I say, that element was so badly and implausibly handled that I flatly don't buy it, even if Rowling does try claim that's what happened. At that point I got thrown out of the story and never was able to get back in.

Or willing to, truth to tell.

Plus, too many of the bits of information we were handed in the aftermath of the raid on the Department of Mysteries in OotP strongly suggested that a return to that location was a top contender for the impending climax of the final "fall of Voldemort."

I was beginning to believe that the phrase "wizard war" was chiming an awfully lot in harmony with Mark Twain's famous



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phrase regarding "two nations divided by a common language." Clearly what wizarding characters mean by "war" or "army" isn't what we or any Potterverse Muggle would recognize as such. Which implies that Harry was probably just as much at sea as we were, causing our view through the Harry filter to be even more than usually distorted.

**Item:** for all the bilge that Sirius Black may spout about Voldemort's "army," the wizarding world *has no armies*. Whatever Sirius meant by the term, is almost certainly not what we would mean by the term. We already know that Voldemort probably never had more than 5-6 dozen actual Death Eaters. He managed to get some Giants on his side, but there are something like just under 100 of them left on the whole planet, and in the event only a couple even showed up to oblige with the heavy lifting. We never heard any solid details regarding the Dementors, or how many of them there are. But it still scarcely amounts to an "army."

Nor do we know how many werewolves constitute an "army." And most werewolves are only really dangerous during a couple of nights a month, and at that point they are just as dangerous to their allies as they are to any opponents. Which renders any supposed value of an army of werewolves dubious to say the least. A werewolf under the influence can't tell the difference between friend and foe; all they register is a human target. And, in fact, the only werewolf we know of who took part in the attack was Greyback. Just like Lupin was the only one who took part in the defense.

Nor do we know what actual number constitutes his "army" of Inferi.





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Although we know where he kept it.

And we could have shut *that* whole complication down before he ever got a chance to use it, if Harry would have just pulled his head out long enough to give someone enough information that could have made it possible to re-locate that cave and go in and clear it out.

(Not that it turned out to matter. The Inferi were just another in the list of disposable plot devices. Even Tom seems to have had no further use for them once he dumped them in that sea cave. Nor did anyone else, least of all Rowling.)

And when you stop to consider the matter, regardless of what Sirius Black had to say about it, that “last time” that everyone is so emphatic about; that whole supposedly catastrophic “war” against Tom Riddle, manifestly took place with hardly a blip on the Muggle radar. War? No, I don’t think so. Raids and skirmishes, ambushes and snipers, Imperioed suicide bombers, yes, that fits. Not formal “battles.”

The problem is that when JKR says “war” we all too often immediately think “military” where we ought to be thinking “gang.” This isn’t the Allies and the Axis, it’s the Crips and the Bloods. Complete with the equivalent of drive-by shootings, and a harried, overextended police force expected to put a stop to it.



Which raises the question of the Order of the Phoenix. I can conceive of absolutely no reason why someone as unwilling to take personal responsibility for anyone else’s safety or well-being as Albus Dumbledore has proved to be, would have

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chosen to create a volunteer vigilante group such as the Order of the Phoenix.

The Ministry had already effectively declared that “Lord Voldemort” was an enemy of the State, and were already attempting to apprehend him, actively combating him in an official capacity. Why the hell would Albus Dumbledore decide to shove his oar in by creating an unofficial resistance group?

The Order certainly appears to serve no purpose that the Ministry was not already performing.

To be perfectly honest, as I said in the Timeline essays, this whole scenario appears to be no more than a labored attempt to depict a tableau of two titularly secluded “leaders” of two symmetrically opposing groups, each with a team of minions, striking attitudes and snarling at each other across a great divide, posing in perfect balance.

The problem with tableaux, however, is that they are, by definition, a completely artificial representation of whatever their apparent subject is. Any hint of movement at all and the illusion is spoilt.

Or, in short; it’s *fake*.

Not, I will admit, as fake as that bogus “Battle of Hogwarts”. The Order does at least appear to have actually existed. We even got to meet several of its members. But the justification of its existence is completely bas-ackward. From outside the fourth wall, the *purpose* of the Order of the Phoenix was to be a “secret society” working for the Light in the face of *Eevil* at a point that the Ministry was opposed to Harry and Albus Dumbledore. There was never any justification for the Order to have been a secret society during VoldWar I, and indeed it



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was openly admitted that the Order *hadn't* been secret during VoldWar I. Without ever giving us any convincing reason for why, if it *wasn't* a secret, it should have ever existed at all.

In short, it appears to have been invented solely to appeal to little boys who dream of having a secret clubhouse with no girls/adults/authority figures allowed. Its whole justification is that it is SECRET. And, as such, it operates entirely on “kid logic” despite the fact that by this point in the series, the protagonists were no longer exactly kids. (Regardless of what Molly Weasley—or Dolores Umbridge—might have to say on the subject.)

Now, I could just *about* believe (and indeed for some years did believe) that Albus might found an Order to give those people who were endangered by Trelawney's first Prophecy a support group. Particularly after the Prophecy demons tossed it into his lap.

On the other hand, Rowling insists that James and Lily and the Marauders went directly from Hogwarts into the Order as “full-time fighters” against Lord Voldemort. That was well before Trelawney was making any Prophecies.

On yet another hand, while we have not seen a lot of indication that Albus favors Gryffindors, for being Gryffindors, we do get more than one indication that he inordinately seemed to favor James Potter.

It isn't so much his failure to expel any of the Marauders after the werewolf caper. To have done so would have potentially uncovered his own actions regarding his arrangements to educate a juvenile victim of lycanthropy at Hogwarts in company with the rest of the wizarding world's children. Since I doubt that he ever ran that plan past the Board of Governors, he

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could not risk that. And even though it was James Potter who averted that information getting out, it was James's own companions and behavior which set the business up. (A case which I now suspect is even more true than Albus ever realized.)

And, given that Albus had arranged for Remus Lupin's presence at Hogwarts, that alone might have explained his laxness in disciplining his “pet project's” companions in their earlier years. He wanted to distance himself and not call further attention to them by showing an interest.

But neither of these factors explains his appointing James Potter as Head Boy. Particularly when the boy had not been serving as a Prefect.

Rowling attempted to weasel around this detail in OotP with her claim that being Quidditch Captain was equivalent to being a Prefect. But that information came too late in the series to be convincing. And for the record, I'm pretty sure that that inclusion was just shoved higgledy-piggldy into HBP because she was tired of being asked why James was Head boy when it was Remus who had been Prefect for their year.

So what was going on there?



Well, it's off the wall, and you won't find any direct canon support for it, but I rather think one possibility is that by the time the Marauder cohort's 7th year came around, Albus knew that James Potter was a Peverill descendant.

And I rather think he knew that James's branch of the family had possession of the Cloak.

It really isn't that much of a stretch, either. We know James



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brought the Cloak to school for several years running. We don't know when he started. We know that the Marauders made very effective use of that Cloak. And we don't know that they were any more careful with it than Harry was. Harry left it lying around in reasonably public areas more than once over the years. James could have done the same. Once at least.

Or, more likely, he and his friends were larking about with it, and managed to be careless enough to get caught. An invisibility cloak has no business in a school. It's also a valuable enough item that it is more likely to have been confiscated and turned over to the Headmaster to be returned to the student's family than to have ended up in Filch's office.

Invisibility cloaks are not common, but they are not unknown, either. Albus knows people who use them in their line of work. His friend Alastor Moody, for example. He's probably already examined them. He would have recognized the difference.

Which undoubtedly would have been confirmed when he returned it to James's father. "Oh that old thing. Yes, been in the family for years. Don't know how long. My grandfather used to tell me stories about it when I was a lad..."

A bit of discrete investigation among the genealogy books in the library would have confirmed any suspicions.

I rather think that the Head Boy appointment could have been an attempt to "cultivate" James Potter.

After all, Albus had been watching Horace operate for something like 40 years by then. How hard could it be?



And when James lost his parents during his 7th year, I rather

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think that Albus decided that he ought to step in with support and guidance, and a grand purpose — and an excuse to keep track of the boy once, he was no longer at school.

So he formed a fine-sounding Order, and sold the Ministry on the idea of having a group of adjuncts and volunteers available at need, and invited James and his friends into it as soon as they sat their NEWTs. And then he convinced a few of his associates to oversee it for him.

Because otherwise, I cannot see any reason for why the Order of the Phoenix should even exist, apart from maintaining symmetry with Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

But I'm sure that the idea would have sounded very impressive to a bunch of adolescents. It certainly sounded "cool" to its presumed 9-year-old intended audience.



Conversely; Let's assume that the Order did already exist.

It was only in 2021, in the course of an email exchange with one of my correspondents, that it finally was pointed out to me that Albus might have founded the Order. But it was Alastor Moody who actually ran it.

My correspondent called attention to the fact that the Order appeared to have survived Albus's death well enough, but once Moody was killed, it seems to have all but completely unraveled, and went pretty much dormant, although some of its members later created Potterwatch.

At which point it was suddenly very easy for me to believe that Albus, after listening to Moody grouching one time too many about obstructionism inside the Ministry, offered to sponsor



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an independent group, not beholden to the Ministry, and let Moody put his actions where his mouth was. Albus would be the titular Head, would call meetings when he had something to bring to their attention, would recruit a few people who he thought might be helpful, but otherwise it was Alastor's baby and *he* could change the diapers.

Albus simply pointed it out to James and his companions, remarking that unlike Auror training it hadn't any specific NEWT requirements (I gather none of the Marauders took Potions at NEWT-level), and did not entail a 3-year training program before earning one's qualifications.



In the event that the reader may not yet have encountered it in any of the other places where it is lurking elsewhere in this collection, I will include here a brief review of my own interpretation of the actual progress of VoldWar I.

It still seems to me that we have been consistently misdirected as to the progression and conduct of VoldWar I throughout the series. I do not know whether this was intentional on Rowling's part, or whether she changed her mind mid-way, hadn't ever really thought it through, or was just putting on airs to be interesting. But in any case, by the end of the series it comes across as cheating.

In the wake of DHs I am forced to conclude that she was using the whole concept of a previous war merely as set-dressing and had never really taken the trouble to work out a plausible scenario for any of it. If such a thing ever existed at all, it still exists only in outline.



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Example: we were consistently led to believe that Voldemort and his "message" had been gaining public support up to the point that, *act*o Sirius Black, he "revealed himself" and his "true goals."

After getting the official Riddle backstory in HBP we can now see that there had never been a time that Voldemort or his "message" ever enjoyed any kind of open public support! The MoM had been trying to capture him since the mid 1960s — which would have either been right about when they first heard of him, or when the DEs started signing their work with the Dark mark.

If people ever believed he had public support, it must have been because they were deceived into believing so. It is enough to make one suspect that Confundus was as much a part of his arsenal as Imperius. Maybe he used it on his author.

Since so far as we've ever been shown, the British ww only has one daily newspaper, one monthly tabloid, and a handful of magazines (and not a large enough population to really support much more than that), just where was Voldemort's message supposed to be being proclaimed? Where was Reggie Black finding those published speeches he was making clipping scrapbooks from? Nothing we've seen of the Ministry suggests that they would have any problem about leaning on the PROPHET if it didn't like what they were publishing. And where was Riddle making these speeches that supposedly were being quoted in the newspapers? He was a terrorist leader that the Ministry was trying to capture. And his "striking appearance" would have limited his public appearances considerably.

Unless, of course, Fudge is now supposed to have been lying





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to the Muggle Prime Minister. But there is a very real limit to how many of your walking exposition machines can be revealed to be lying before the whole readership simply concludes that the one who is lying to them is the author.



None of this story holds together. By the end of HBP I flatly no longer believed it. Maybe these alleged speeches were printed on broadsheets or handbills and distributed secretly overnight. That's the only possibility that still works. And then the Ministry would have been trying to find who produced them (and distributed them *at Hogwarts*, since at that point Regulus Black was still in school).

Even prior to HBP, I had quite honestly begun to wonder just how much of the story we had been getting concerning Vold-War I was all smoke and mirrors. Either that, or Voldemort must have masked his true objectives under some *other* sort of form of opposition to the Ministry, complete with some sanitized "public" message that would appeal to at least *some* of the public. But that message could hardly have been the straightforward one of pureblood supremacy which was attributed to him by the time the series opened.

C'mon, we know that the majority of the wizarding public (close to 75%) doesn't really have that much of an issue with Muggle-borns — being *related* to them, after all — and if they have an issue with Muggles, it isn't the be-all and end-all of their existence. So any alleged initial public "message" was almost certainly NOT the one that has been represented to us to date. What we have been told has to be the sum of what



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everyone has figured out or pieced together since then.

Or, in short, we have been given the *revisionist* version. Most of the wizarding public were probably *never* aware of what we are aware of now, certainly not at the time it was going on. And as it stands it just doesn't make sense.

And no, post-HBP it is clear that there was *never* any such initial public "message." Tom Riddle was an outlaw from the get-go, he was *always* a violent terrorist leader, and his only message was; "I'm going to raise unmitigated hell, because I can, and you can't stop me."

And while some of the nastier extremists inside the pure-blood isolationist, or supremacist, factions might have muttered that he had the "right idea" — mostly because they could not wrap their tiny minds around the concept that despite the private recountings of his alleged high-flown sentiments regarding blood purity, which were filtering down the grapevine, *they* were in danger from him too — nobody but his own followers truly *supported* him. And those followers numbered in the dozens, not the hundreds.

For that matter, looked at objectively, the probability is that the *public* wouldn't have even known what his actual statements even *were*.

He wasn't making public appearances on the wizarding wireless or holding political rallies. After first surfacing at some point in the mid-1960s, drawing the Ministry's attention by sending up the Dark mark at crime scenes, and openly carrying on for a few years in a manner which gave "Death Eaters" and "Lord Voldemort" a measure of "brand recognition," he allegedly pulled some stunt, about 1970, that rendered him, personally,





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utterly unmentionable.

Everyone was getting their information either from the Ministry-authorized version printed in the DAILY PROPHET, those hypothetical subversive broadsheets, or the word-of-mouth testimony of what he stood for as filtered by the people whose families he had already signed up.

He wasn't even out there leading his own troops on their raids. He lets other people take the physical risks. If you weren't a follower you had practically zilch likelihood of ever coming face-to-face with him. Unless he decided to target you *personally*. He wasn't ANY kind of a public figure, he was the never-seen bogymen under the bed.



And the public perception (quite possibly fueled by the Ministry's ever more draconian measures established to try to oppose an unseen enemy) was such that Voldemort was rapidly gaining power, and the Ministry was certainly getting no closer to stopping him, the likelihood is that, in all actuality, he was fighting a steadily losing battle, and his organization was hemorrhaging resources merely trying to hold its ground.



Well, that was last time. He doesn't have the advantage of any kind of carefully constructed set-up now. Indeed, the reports we heard of his followers' activities over the course of HBP appeared to be completely random, sporadic violence for violence's sake. Much of his organization's resources will have been dissipated or reapportioned over the period of his absence.

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And by the opening of HBP, one of the followers generally assumed to be in possession of the broadest scope of resources (Malfoy) had now been unmasked and taken off the board. All Voldemort had left to deploy was his reputation. And fear. He definitely has that on his side.

And also, last time he didn't have the Dementors.

Still, at the end of HBP his "organization" now numbered some 3 dozen Death Eaters, an undisclosed number of suddenly leaderless werewolves, a clutch of animated corpses, the Dementors, and potentially up to 80-95 Giants which ended up numbering all of two).

Which, apart from the Dementors all sounded pretty marginal to me



Besides, if you *try* to look at it rationally, you can tell that while Voldemort unquestionably wanted to see Albus Dumbledore dead, and that settling the score with Harry Potter was continuing to be his top priority, there was no rational reason in the world why he would still want to take possession of the school. Regardless of how much he may have once been attached to the place. If he needs a stronghold, he would be far better off to appropriate Azkaban. The Dementors would even help him do it.

If he needed to capture a location for the sake of its inherent resources then the odds-on favorite would be the Ministry of Magic, or, rather, the Department of Mysteries itself. We caught a glimpse of rather a lot of potentially useful resources during the course of that raid on the DoM. Even if the collec-



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tion of Time-Turners did get smashed.

And, in fact, regarding the school, once the Ministry fell and he had one of his own followers inserted into the school as Headmaster, he appears to have taken no further interest in the place. Not even for the sake of taking charge of Gryffindor's Sword, which was now sitting right there in the Headmaster's office for anyone to waltz off with.

But, going into HBP, I was convinced that if there was to be a Death Eater attack on Hogwarts at all (and I still tended to sniff at the idea) it would be because the DEs were after an individual, not because they had any interest in the school itself. And that kind of attack is more likely to succeed by guile than by force.

And insofar as motivation goes, I turned out to be absolutely right.

However.

By that time it had also occurred to me that at some point, it might make a great deal of sense for Voldemort to send the \*Giants\* to attack Hogwarts.

As a *diversion*.

That ploy didn't come off in HBP, so I was much less confident that the idea still played at all. (Particularly if the school remained closed for a term.) But it hadn't been completely counted out.

A Giant attack on Hogwarts had really looked quite likely at the end of OotP. And while I doubted that it would happen in the way I had outlined it *then*, there was still an outside chance that it might happen in some form.

My supposition was that even if I was right, and Voldemort

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doesn't really give squat about maintaining wizarding Secrecy, not even *he* was going to march 80+ Giants into the heart of London to attack the Ministry. Or not yet.

Out in the boonies at Hogwarts, however, in an all-wizarding enclave, away from any Muggle observers, the Giants could be a valuable playing card. Any damage the Giants manage to produce at the school or in Hogsmeade village would be fine by him, and he didn't really care about *their* casualty rate. He might have thrown them at the school just for the hell of it. But he hadn't so many resources at his disposal not to make use of the ones he had. And he had to have had some plan in mind to have sent McNair to the Giants as an envoy in the first place.

Given that Giants are largely magic-resistant it would take a lot of coordination and personnel to get any situation they were involved in under control, and any coordination and personnel dispatched to deal with a Giant attack on Hogwarts is likely to be coordination and personnel which will then not be available to the Ministry when it counted, and he would make his strike (probably by stealth) at their own Headquarters.

And any damage the Giants did to the school might make it even easier for the action of Book 7 to continue to move beyond the walls of Hogwarts itself.

I also thought it might at least make it easier for Harry to keep his date for the scheduled final confrontation with the Dark Lord. I was not altogether convinced that the Dark Lord was going to be able to come to him, and I was still half-way expecting the final showdown to take place in the Department of Mysteries. The US cover art did rather suggest that amphitheater in the Chamber of the Veil.

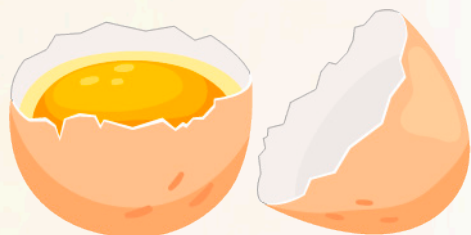


## The Battle of Hogwarts and Other Fakery

But even if the DEs only managed to barricade themselves in the DoM it would put Voldemort in a better position, resource-wise than he was at the end of HBP. And I think he still had Rookwood to advise him once he was there. I don't recall us catching sight of Rookwood during the raid in OotP. (And one really has to ask why not? *He* was the one who used to *work* there.)

But it really seemed to be fairly clear that Books 6 & 7 (which Rowling was still lying in her teeth and claiming were two halves of the same story — which they are absolutely not) would be the story of Voldemort's Last Stand, not the story of an extended military campaign. And I suspected that there was still a real possibility that for much of the last half of Book 7 to have the DEs largely out of the picture, and Voldemort's active support whittled down to only himself, a few last followers (Bellatrix, Pettigrew and — he thinks — Snape most likely) — and the Dementors.

And the wizarding world would *still* not have the nerve to face him..



## The Balognium Factor

Balognium is an element that you will find upon no Periodic Table in any classroom in the world. It is, however, far from rare.

Balognium, or, alternately, boloneyum (from: "baloney") is an element highly familiar to SF fans. Or, in any case, that is the context in which I first encountered the term. The term may be unique to that venue, but the phenomenon is far too widespread to make any argument about the element being so as well. Balognium just seems to be particularly easy to recognize when you are pretending to be dealing with hard science.



**B**alognium is an element in a story that makes absolutely no sense, is unsupported by any branch of science or natural law, or is laughably internally inconsistent, and is all but completely impossible to rationalize.

But it is — *always* — absolutely necessary to make the story function. And the unspoken contract with the reader is that the reader will suspend disbelief over the balognium's thoroughgoing improbability and in return the author will attempt to limit himself to only one piece of balognium per story.

The Imperius Curse was Goblet of Fire's allotted piece of balognium.



I would have to say that in the Imperius curse Rowling handed us an absolutely classic piece of balognium. We were going round and round on this issue for weeks on one of my lists. And not just once, either.

And the whole issue is completely irresolvable; even despite





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the fact that sometimes what can be the purest, most unalloyed bolognium in science fiction may be a staple genre “trope” in fantasy. The Imperius Curse does not fall into this comfortable “safe zone.” The Imperius Curse is pure bolognium in any genre, falling solidly within the classically defined subject heading of “mind control.”

The main problem is that, in Imperio, Rowling has tossed us all a plot device bone which wasn’t properly realized in canon to begin with, so of course we can’t come to any kind of a consensus about it. Rowling isn’t a bit clear on how it works and she is internally inconsistent with how it is depicted. Nor does she explain how it is distinguished from any of the other forms of “mind control” that she has handed us. Because she’s handed us more than one.

We never actually heard of Imperio, by name, before GoF and in that book we are given three supposed demonstrations, or reports, of this curse in action and even there they simply do not add up. They especially do not add up to what she had already shown us, and *masterfully* shown us, of the operation of a similar, but perhaps subtly different form of mind control all the way back back in PS/SS in the “possession” of Professor Quirrell. Or whatever variant of this skill was used in CoS in the possession of Ginny Weasley (which we learned of only from report, since we never actually saw it in action).

In fact we are left unclear as to whether Imperius is, or is not, a form of curse-induced possession. Although it certainly appears to behave like that at first glance. The matter was not clarified in the course of DHs, either. The subject only became even more confused.

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From a totally outside perspective we are given Barty Crouch Sr’s frankly astonishing behavior upon his surprise reappearance at Hogwarts, which is later explained as being a result of his attempts to throw off the effects of the curse. His disjointed speech makes next to no sense at all. It appears that he doesn’t know where — or when — he is. He recognizes nobody. He comes across as completely deranged.

Actually, what he is behaving like is someone right out of a “B” movie. No, not even that. Something more like a “D” movie. One of the ones directed by Edward G Wood Jr, maybe.

It’s completely unbelievable that anyone under this kind of curse could have gone out in public and behaved “normally” and aroused no suspicion (as we are later given to understand that Crouch was doing at any time we ever saw him after his first appearance at the Quidditch World Cup).

We get further amplification of this general impression in HBP when we get the report that someone botched the curse and the intended victim started quacking like a duck. Excuse me? What has a duck got to do with someone failing to take control of your will? The author is presenting what is repeatedly stated as being a horrific, unforgivable curse, and she is playing it for laughs.



From a “1st person account” we have Crouch Jr’s confession. Of which I have been suspicious from the beginning, and am even more so ever since we were later told in passing (very late



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in OotP) that Snape keeps false Veritiserum in his stores as well as the genuine article. But even if falsifying the Veritiserum was not a factor in that confession, so much of that account didn't match up with the way things must have actually *worked*, that I am *still* suspicious.

In this account, young Crouch — who certainly ought to be in a position to know — describes being under the curse as moving in a fog, hardly aware of what was going on around him. This really makes it sound as though the Imperius Curse must be something other than useful for purposes of long term or long-distance sabotage, since your puppets don't seem to be able to act upon any personal initiative and are suffering from sensory deprivation.

It certainly doesn't match up to Madam Rosemerta's behavior in HBP where she is supposedly under the Imperius curse any time we saw her over the whole book, and no one got even a hint that anything was wrong.

It also does not match Crouch Sr's behavior before he was pulled out of his office and imprisoned in his own home. Despite the fact that he was supposedly under the Curse any time we saw him after the World Cup. If the curse is apt to fade off or be thrown off that consistently you would think that it would be discovered a lot more easily than everyone seems to understand.

Nor does it really match what young Crouch had told us earlier in Moody's classroom. Neither does it jibe with what we were shown of his classroom examples. But, like I say, I am currently inclined to view any information that Crouch Jr gave us in that confession with grave suspicion. Most particularly anything to do with how he apparently, if we are to believe him,

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"just managed" to throw his father's curse off so conveniently with such perfect timing in order to further Voldemort's aims.



And stacked up against those portrayals we have Harry's own experience when Crouch attempted to put the curse on him; during which attempts the curse swept over him with a feeling of relaxation and peace leaving him open for whatever suggestion the "controller" might give him. Sounds rather like sensory deprivation again. We're also told that he wasn't altogether clear on his actions while under it, but there is no indication in the narrative that he was behaving, however briefly, like an obvious puppet. And he was aware of the controller's actual instructions. Whether they were verbal or not.

Which is another issue, regarding that classroom demonstration. When Harry almost failed to comply with the instructions how would the rest of the class *\*know\** that that was what happened on no more than Moody's say so, unless Moody had informed them of what Harry was expected to do? Evidently, even though Harry was hearing a voice in his head, there may have been a voice in his ears as well. Or else they are a trusting lot, the Gryffindors.

For that matter, spiders do not understand English, but Moody was still able to (nonverbally) instruct one to dance. And evidently such instructions must operate as a long-distance mind-to-mind link, or an improbably perfect "post-hypnotic suggestion" which can be maintained at a distance, for even Percy Weasley would probably have noticed someone hanging about the office and prompting his employer's actions; at least



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after the fact. Or somebody, over a matter of several months, might have noticed that Madam Rosemerta was periodically acting a bit strangely.

Let alone anyone under attack by a puppet back in Vold-War I, which makes next to total nonsense of Lucius Malfoy and others' "Imperius defense." (Unless the whole thing was a blatant case of political deal-making in which Barty Crouch Sr must have taken active part. I mean, stop and think about it for a moment.)

But, as for Rosemerta; I suspect that Albus Dumbledore had figured the matter out at least by the time they had the poisoned mead incident at the beginning of March, if not directly after the attack on Katie Bell in October, and he was forced to — perhaps reluctantly — leave matters as they stood, for fear of tipping Malfoy off to the fact that Albus knew what he was up to. His pretense of only just at the last moment realizing how the situation stood was intended to pass the information to Harry, so Harry would tell someone, now that it was safe to do so. Preferably someone who could rectify the situation. Albus was staging his exit that evening and would not have been able to take charge of it himself. Nor would Snape, who undoubtedly knew of the situation as well, but wasn't going to be around, either.



Unless there is an alternate reading of that classroom business which I have not yet considered. Which is not unlikely.

This appears to have provisionally been the case. When the discrepancy was pointed out to me it made for a shift in percep-

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tion of what may have been going on in that classroom.

The way Crouch/Moody describes the curse in class is inconsistent with both the testimony in his "confession" and with his father's external behavior as Rowling showed it to us in the same book. His description was not that it forced the subject to partake of actions "against his will," but that the subject had NO will of his own while under it. That it did not force anyone to DO anything. It forced them to be completely open to the suggestion that they WANTED to do something. Much like the old-fashioned perception of hypnotism, or the even older "Mesmerism."

What Crouch's classroom *description* actually DID seem to accurately describe was not anything we were shown in GoF at all. But it was an excellent definition of "possession" and matched up perfectly to the behavior of Professor Quirrell throughout the course of PS/SS.

Voldemort (or VaporMort at that point) did not have Quirrell under a classic Imperius curse — which requires the use of a wand — but what he had done to take control of him certainly was something in the same general class of total perceptual control.

Ergo: we might want to consider that the Imperius Curse IS in fact a form of curse-induced possession.

We already know that possession exists in the Potterverse. But we have been given no idea of how rare it may be. The only person in the whole series who has ever been stated as having taken *possession* of anyone, beast or being, is Tom Riddle.

You would think that with wizards having existed all the way back into prehistory, there would be more to be said on the subject than that.



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Or at least there would be rather more of a flap over the fact that Tom Riddle is known to be able to *do* it.

And as for the way Rowling has shown it working: “mind” control is clearly a misnomer.

Quirrell’s intellect was not affected at all. It was his will, his perceptions, and his judgment which were distorted, in fact disabled, and overwritten by those of his Master. Voldemort’s values, opinions and priorities had become his own, and he was tragically unable to even recognize any difference, apart from a vague memory of having once thought and felt otherwise about such things. And even that memory was now being processed and viewed through the contemptuous filter of his controller’s opinion of it.

The condition really does appear to have been a malady of the soul.

It somewhat later occurred to me that there may have been an additional emotional constraint on Quirrell as well. Young Tom Riddle, when we caught up to him in his orphanage boasted that he could make people *feel* what he wanted them to, as well as *do* what he wanted them to. We have been given no confirmation of what that particular talent may be, but whatever it is, it sounds highly disturbing.

If any of this mimics how Imperius really works, then it is no wonder it is unforgivable. That would be the true horror of the curse. Once it takes hold, the subject is not consciously acting “against his will.” He simply has no sense whatsoever that what he is doing may be *wrong*. While in this state of brutally twisted “innocence,” the subject is utterly free of both doubt and guilt. The perfect vassal and the perfect vessel — so long as you can



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keep him under it.

The actions a person takes while under such an influence are also his own — it is only the impulse and the “reasons” for those actions which have been superimposed. Under Imperius, one may act counter to one’s own values and against one’s own best interests, but one does not act out of character. Which is what is supposed to make Imperius tampering so hard to detect. NO ONE suspected Madame Rosemerta. A one-eyed baboon could have seen that there was something wrong with Crouch Sr.

And, unless obliterated, one probably *remembers* the actions one took while one was under the curse. At least vaguely. Quirrell was indeed quite literally “full of hate and greed and ambition,” but so far as we can tell, none of that was his own.

And Rowling showed us this. Very clearly, very adeptly. But when she did it, we did not understand what we were seeing, because we lacked the proper context in which to examine or interpret it. Now we know, and can. And once she brought it back in GoF she immediately stopped giving us believable examples. Instead, she played it for laughs.



For, while Rowling showed us this brilliantly in PS/SS, she did not even come close to showing us this in GoF, where it really mattered. And I don’t know why she didn’t. Since she obviously *can*.

She also did not show us anything even close to the Imperius class of control in CoS, which was a whole other basket of snakes. From what we were ever told of it, Diary!Riddle’s control of Ginny Weasley comes across as being more in the nature





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of pushing her out of her own brain while he was driving it. Until the matter was clarified in DHs it was easy to believe that this may have also been the method used in driving the snake who bit Ginny's father in OotP. Ginny has still never recovered the memories of what she was doing while he was in control. I suspect she never will.

And we cannot know for sure, because we never actually saw Ginny when Riddle was driving her. She may have acted just like Professor Quirrell.

We were not given any *specific* reason for why he would have wiped her memory. But it is most likely to be because it was not in Tom's best interests to let Ginny figure out what was going on one minute before such a discovery was inevitable. So, unless he was willing to keep control of her at *all* times (which was probably beyond his strength, particularly at first) then to keep her as ignorant as possible was a much safer bet. Effectively Obliviating her after each "use" strung the situation out for much longer than he might have done otherwise. As things stand, she did not figure out that it was her "friend" in the Diary that was responsible for her blackouts for nearly two months after the first time he took control of her at Halloween.

What we will probably never know is just how conscious Ginny was during the periods that Riddle was controlling her. Since he effectively Obliviated her after each use, I don't think she will get those memories back any more than Lockhart has recovered his. But there is a good deal of suggestion in the text that she may have been at least somewhat conscious of what was going on *\*at the time\** given that the Diary Revenant tells us that he forced her to write her own farewell and drove her



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down into the Chamber — and that she put up a fight against it, too. This does not really sound like Quirrell's passive, unquestioning obedience.

And for that matter, I think that by the middle of the Spring term, Ginny only had to be in proximity with the Diary for it to be able to take control of her. After all, how likely is it that, with her knowing that it was responsible for what was happening to her, she would have ever deliberately written in the thing once she stole it back from Harry. And yet there was an attack the same day she did that, and another one some days or weeks afterwards. I think that by then the connection had become strong enough for Riddle to reach out and grab her even if it was packed away in her trunk. Let alone sitting in her pocket.



And more people than I have pointed out that there may have been something other than mere coincidence at work over that period — apart from Justin Fitch-Fetchley and Nearly Headless Nick, everyone who was actually attacked by the basilisk could be interpreted as a rival for either Percy or Harry's attention, or someone that everyone actively disliked. (No one but Filch mourned the petrification of Mrs Norris.) That's three attacks out of six which targeted people who just happened to be *\*in Ginny's way.\** And Penelope was probably only attacked because she was with Hermione.

Ginny poured a lot of herself into that Diary. And Riddle used every bit of it. Keep Riddle's own character in mind. He would have loved the idea of forcing his trusting little "friend" to go a-hunting the people who she had moaned about in the





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Diary. Her reluctance and protests throughout these (to her) nightmare journeys would have only added spice to the dish. He *likes* making people do things that they truly don't want to do. Things that they know are wrong. And after her memory of the incident was wiped she might have been left with only a horrible feeling of "wrongness" about how most of the people now in the hospital wing were people she had been jealous of. I do suspect that Justin and Nick may have been an accident (although it needs to be remembered that Justin was in the forefront of the whole Heir of Slytherin uproar). That encounter seems to have taken place before curfew, so she and the basilisk may have come across them before they managed to find whoever that evening's real target was. The fact that Justin was Muggle-born obscured the issue.

Ginny's own position was distinctly unpleasant that year, regardless of her lifelong desire to "go to Hogwarts." Once she got there she was in a miserable state of crushing on Harry, who ignored her, and she was also dodging Percy — who was *worried* about her, and trying to *help*, but reading the situation all wrong — and the twins were giving her grief, now that they had her where Molly couldn't protect her. (And indeed, permitting Percy to take charge of the situation would have only increased the twins' determination to give her a hard time for joining the "other side.")

If anything good came out of the Year of the Basilisk, it is that once the truth came out, it spooked the twins enough to back off. We don't get much of any indication of them going out of their way to get at Ginny during years 3–5. And there is every indication of their having done so in year 2.

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Mind you, it is possible — even likely — that the "brain fog" that Crouch Jr describes in his confession is the result of putting someone under Imperius and giving them no further instructions, not even to "act naturally," leaving them in a sort of limbo instead. But this does not explain the sort of behavior that Rowling describes as Crouch Sr's attempt to throw off the curse. That simply does not fit anything. It was poorly handled and there is no good excuse for it. We already know that she can do better than that.

As to Crouch/Moody in the classroom; if one re-reads with a bit more care, one can see that Harry's "instructions" did not appear to come through any verbal orders that he was being given, but from a voice that seemed to be echoing from the depths of his empty mind. The fact that it was a classroom demonstration, however suggests that there may have been verbal orders being given as well as the mental imperative. This may well have confused the issue in the perceptions of the kids who were being put under the curse, or witnessing it used on others. Crouch may have been deliberately giving the kids the impression that originally came through to me, in that the controller "usually" would have to be close enough to give verbal instructions. If such is possible, he may have even been adjusting the effects of the curse itself to exaggerate the "empty mind" feeling as well. Which might make them feel a lot more confident that they would be able to recognize that someone was making the attempt to take control of them than was actually the case. Making them believe that they were rather safer



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than they, in fact, were.

NOT such a helpful lesson after all.



What was not evident until about Book 6, however, is that although “Moody” did not succeed in teaching anyone but Harry to resist Imperius, it seems likely that his instruction may have gone some way in teaching Malfoy how to cast it. We never got to hear how “Moody’s” lecture was phrased for anybody but the Gryffindors. Although given Crouch Jr’s detestation of any DE who escaped, I can’t imagine him being all that helpful to the Slytherins, unless under Voldemort’s orders. Which he might well have been.

It is also necessary to attempt to resolve the paradox of a Voldemort follower actively teaching Dumbledore’s students to resist Imperius. But you will notice he seems to have managed to keep it so that no one in the class but Harry actually accomplished it. And we are directly told that he spent several class sessions working on it with him until Harry could do it. I now suspect that he probably put all of that classroom time into teaching Harry to do it in order to avoid putting in the time it would have taken to teach any of the others.

In fact, recognizing that Harry had a high enough level of natural resistance to the curse that he could not have reliably kept him from figuring it out, he may have made a virtue of necessity. It made him look a lot more genuine to Dumbledore, too, to be able to point to at least one success story.

We were handed yet another piece of mind control magic in HBP with the discovery that through Legilimency/Occlumency/

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Memory charms or what have you, a wizard can implant a false memory in the mind of others. The true memory is still there, although buried, and with skill can be extracted.

Rowling strongly implies that Dumbledore had attempted to use Morfin Gaunt’s true memory related to the Riddle massacre as grounds to campaign for Morfin’s release, and may have only failed in this cause due to Morfin’s death. I have also since come around to the belief that most of the Pensieve evidence which he later shared with Harry, had originally been gathered to build a case to present to the Wizengamot, in an attempt to file an accusation of murder against Tom Riddle, which might have put Riddle on the wanted list before he even returned from his self-imposed exile.



So, what about a few other bits of balognium scattered throughout the series?

Prisoner of Azkaban’s obvious piece of balognium was the bloody Time-Turner.

Again, this is an absolutely classic piece of balognium. As is just about any other form of time travel. Regardless of the genre.

I defy anyone to explain the working of a Time-Turner in any manner which makes coherent sense. The closest anyone has ever come is the level of “good enough,” never all the way to “convincing.” But there is no question that the Time-Turner was absolutely necessary to the functioning of that story, and so we must suspend our disbelief. Even the somewhat dicey methodology regarding Animagi cannot compete in the balognium sweepstakes with the Time-Turner. Or its baggage. Purest top-



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grade balognium, that Time-Turner. Finest kind.



What does not appear to be balognium, however, is Albus setting Harry and Hermione up to rescue Sirius and Buckbeak. At least not once one's disbelief in the Time-Turner itself has been suspended.

Since there simply isn't any better place in the collection to tuck this in, I am stowing it here, but I admit that it is both speculative, and a digression.

Albus was having a very odd sort of an evening on June 6, 1994.

First off, there was that strangeness of the case of the disappearing hippogriff. Albus had seen the beast lying tethered in Hagrid's pumpkin patch himself, and a scant few minutes later, when he glanced out the window, the beast, and the tether, were simply gone.

To be sure, Albus was relieved for Hagrid's sake. He didn't think the beast was especially dangerous, either — although it *hadn't* been wise to use the creature as an example for a class of 3rd years. But Albus knew that *he* had nothing to do with the creature's disappearance, and he was just as sure that Hagrid hadn't either. An oddity, indeed.

A couple of hours later he was roused out of bed and to the window, by one of his little silver monitors, where he was treated to the perfectly appalling sight of every Dementor in Hogsmeade swarming onto the school grounds and converging upon something by the edge of the lake. Apparently they had finally caught Sirius Black. Given what we know about Albus's stated opinion on Dementors, it's the last thing that he had

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hoped to see, *regardless* of what he thought about Black.

Then, from the other side of the lake, a Patronus galloped, attacked the Dementors, and drove them away from their prey.

And Albus recognized that Patronus. He had seen Harry cast it during one of the last season's Quidditch games, when young Malfoy and his friends had dressed up as Dementors as a prank.

But then, once he had thrown on his robe and made his way down to the entrance hall, he met Snape, floating Black, and three 3rd-year students, one of them Harry, all unconscious, into the castle on stretchers.

Harry had not been on the other side of the lake. He had been in the group that was being attacked.

So who cast the Patronus? He didn't know of any other living wizard who might have a stag Patronus.

He sent Snape and the students on to the infirmary to be checked over and to contact Fudge, while he questioned Black.

It didn't take long to bring up the discovery of the Secret Keeper switch. And Albus being a master Legilimens, could tell that Black was not lying. In any consideration of decency, Black would best be gotten away from the castle before Fudge arrived.

Which must have been just about when the recollection that the Granger girl had the use of a Time-Turner this particular year finally got a chance to surface.

And, of course that was the answer. Harry *had* cast that Patronus because he had gone *back* to cast that Patronus. Ergo: Albus must have *sent* him back to cast the Patronus.

— and to rescue Hagrid's hippogriff. And, now, to rescue Black.





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After all, once the Dementors had shown themselves to be so poorly under the Ministry's control as to mob a Quidditch game in broad daylight, you know that Albus must have set one of his little monitors to alert him \*immediately\* the moment one of them glided onto the school grounds again. Once you put that probability into the equation, it all adds up.

Although I will have to say that I think Rowling made a very silly decision over the reasons given in the text for the "you must not be seen" exhortation. Namely that wizards had been known to attack their future, or past selves if they encountered them unaware.

If at any point during the year (after the evening of the Start of Term Feast) Hermione had miscalculated and met herself she might have given herself a minor shock and no doubt castigated herself for carelessness, but the explanation that people had hexed their future or past selves is ridiculous. At any point after the evening she arrived at Hogwarts and was issued that Time-Turner both her future and her present or past selves would have been fully aware that she had access to a Time-Turner and would have known perfectly well what had happened. Hexed herself? No. Not even close. Too silly, too silly, much, *much* too silly. That reasoning smacks of the overheated sort of exhortations which promise blindness or insanity resulting from various private activities which are as harmless as they are commonplace.

And for that matter; let's take a bloody reality check here. She was using that Time-Turner to attend classes. She was



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"being seen" by everyone in those classes *and* the instructors! What the hell do you mean by "you must not be seen," eh? How is she supposed to *avoid* being seen is more like it! Sheesh!



I am still not altogether sure that we were given any genuine balognium in CoS. Apart from the possession of Ginny Weasley, and that all took place off-stage.

The Polyjuice comes closest, and it may very well turn out to qualify by the time the series winds up. (It did. It didn't have to, and it wouldn't have if Rowling could have been arsed to keep track of how long a dose of the stuff is supposed to last. But she didn't.) But shape-shifting is unmistakably one of those issues where what is balognium in SF does not necessarily translate to balognium in fantasy. Shape-shifting is a staple genre trope used in just about every branch of fantasy.

But unless it is stated as being simply the nature of the shape-shifter it requires intelligible rules. Tonks is a Metamorphomagus. That's her nature. No further explanation necessary. You can either accept it, or you can be a pill.

I agree that the introduction of this particular *class* of shape-shifter might have had a smoother transition if we had ever heard of the existence of Metamorphomagi in passing before we actually got to meet one (during McGonagall's lecture introducing Animagi at the start of Year 3 would have been a good place for it). And I also agree that we were never shown any good *reason* in canon for why Rowling felt that she *needed* to introduce one, but that's a minor issue.

And in any event, in the same way Polyjuice couldn't techni-





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cally have been balognium in CoS since, in that story, nothing of major importance depended on it, Metamorphomagi aren't balognium now.

Animagi are a slightly different case. The storyline actively needs them. There are a lot of fiddling details about Animagi which make no sense. Like the way their clothing and their wands transform with them. Rowling may have snuck a minor piece of balognium here into PoA along with the major one of the Time-Turner. But this isn't a conclusive issue. I tended to doubt that Animagi were going to be a major issue in Book 7, and indeed they weren't, but considering the weight they carried in the plotline of PoA I wasn't going to bet the farm on it not coming up at all.

I'll admit that I'm still inclined to put Polyjuice on the list for CoS's allotted piece of balognium, even though Rowling didn't actually use it for anything important until GoF, where it became one of those things which is essential to the function of the story. Which is a requirement for determining true balognium (rather than just a detail which turns out to be a dud).

Given the gallons of the stuff Crouch Jr must have needed to produce in order to tide him through the school year, it is surprising that "Moody's" office didn't smell of cabbage the way Myrtle's loo did the year Hermione and her friends did their illicit brewing in it. But most of the "...but? ...but?" moments regarding Polyjuice in GoF can be weaseled around without that much difficulty, even if the total doesn't quite add up.

And compared to the nonsense deployed related to the Imperius Curse, it isn't even a contender.

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On the other hand, Als like the Riddle Diary (and the Marauders' map, or the Sorting Hat for that matter) all show definite promise in the balognium sweepstakes. But I thought we may have seen the last new introduction of anything like that kind of thing by mid-series (and the Riddle Diary was fairly conclusively explained in HBP). I was beginning to have reservations about the Pensieve, but those were not put to the test. And the other shoe has never fallen regarding the Hat.

PS/SS seems on a surface rereading to be a "balognium free zone" so far as I can tell. Apart from the mind control of Professor Quirrell. But that certainly qualifies, even if in that instance it is handled in a way that makes internal sense.

I am not sure that we were given any definite balognium in OotP, either, although we have a couple of candidates. Both of which on close examination can be unraveled satisfactorily enough to pass muster as far as we have seen to date. Even the Room of Requirement is still well within the range of the workable — regardless of the fact that it is as instantly ripe for fanon abuse as the Time-Turner and the Trelawney Prophecy.

Half-Blood Prince was too recent an addition to the storyline for me to be able to nominate any definitive candidates for balognium in it back when I first wrote this essay. Unless you want to count the sea cave. Although, on reflection, to me, the sea cave stank less of balognium than of red herring.

I suspected this conclusion would not last. There were way too many things in HBP which directly, or tacitly contradicted information that we had been given in earlier books, but a con-



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tinuity glitch does not automatically translate into balognium. I thought that there may be further revisions to this particular article as details got properly digested, or as observations finally sank in, but they haven't worked their way to the surface yet, and by this time I suspect they never will.



However it is rapidly occurring to me that we've got a whole related class of magics which are beginning to show every symptom of turning into a ripe cargo of balognium. And that is the whole issue of contractual magic.

Contractual magic clearly exists in the Potterverse. Rowling used various forms of it throughout the series. And did so quite openly. There appear to be at least as many different varieties of it as there are of mind control. But unlike mind control, it isn't absolutely certain that the issue is one of balognium, even yet.

I suspect that contractual magics are pretty widely used in the Potterverse. And anything that's widely used is unlikely to be a part of the Dark Arts, even if it may have originally been developed from them.

That contractual magic is used in the Potterverse, and used pretty widely is pretty much of a no-brainer, otherwise there are wizards who would be attempting to cheat each other left, right, and forward.

The first piece of blatantly contractual magic we got our noses rubbed in turned up in GoF. Once Harry's name came out of the Goblet of Fire he was magically bound to compete. Leading one to wonder whether the fire in that Goblet was anything like the three ropes of fire that were later gener-

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ated by the three clauses of the Unbreakable Vow in HBP. I'm inclined to believe that it was. In fact I'm not convinced that it wasn't the same thing altogether.

And, I repeat, once Harry's name came out of the Goblet, he was *magically bound* to compete in the Tournament. Which *also* consisted of three clauses, excuse me, tasks.

He wasn't required to win. He was only bound to *compete*, which is to say, to take part, and go through the motions, try to do his best. If he survived the danger of the task itself, but didn't win, no harm done. He had effectively pledged to compete before several hundred witnesses. So long as the witnesses were satisfied that he had met the requirements he would not incur the consequences of a refusal.

We were never actually told the consequences of a refusal, were we?

Just that he *had* to compete. That he *couldn't* refuse, and they couldn't do the selection process over.



Funny thing that it's taken until now to figure out that we were missing a rather important piece of information here, weren't we?

And of course, a later addition to this particular class of magic was HBP's Unbreakable Vow.

Frankly, I think the readers are making a lot more of that Vow than seems indicated.

Harry's pledge to compete was made publicly (by someone else without his knowledge and permission) and depended upon his satisfying the witnesses to that pledge.



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I think Snape's did also

There was no demigod with a checklist following him around, comparing, and marking off his actions to Voldemort's precise phrasing of Malfoy's mission. I think that he and Narcissa were making an end run around a planned double-cross which would have cost Draco Malfoy his life — and quite possibly Narcissa's as well.

And it was Snape's own magic that was tied up in that knot and ready to bite him unless the Bonder released him before the whole thing came off.



I doubt that such Vows could be at all uncommon if a pair of country-bred, home-schooled, geographically isolated 7-year-olds know about them, and how to set one up. C'mon, this is something that is *general* knowledge in the wizarding world, even if Harry hasn't ever heard it referred to by name.

Let's face it, the Weasley twins didn't learn about it from television, and even if Arthur did mention it when talking shop at home, just mentioning the term would not have told them about the whole "handshake agreement" format for casting the spell.

Admittedly, from a meta standpoint that whole exercise was probably just in aid of producing a dodgy joke regarding Fred's left buttock, and getting out the information that to undertake such a Vow is to put your life at stake. But the fact remains that having handed it to us, it is now canon, and we need to find a rational context for it. Preferably one which would *also* allow for Draco Malfoy's dismissive and contemptuous reaction when

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Snape claimed to have sworn one to Draco's mother. Malfoy had always acted as if he liked Snape up to then.

By this time I'm not all that impressed by that Vow, either.

What I suspect is that rather than some obscure, mysterious piece of Dark Arts booga-booga, the Unbreakable Vow is generally regarded as an antiquated, ceremonial, faintly embarrassing, anachronism. Ghod knows, if its underlying principle is incorporated into the selection process of the *TriWizard Tournament* — which hadn't even been *held* for a couple of hundred years — the odds are that it's hardly the latest word in sophisticated contractual magics. I'm sure the wizarding world has something *much* more efficient and manageable by this time.

In fact that Vow is probably something right out of the times of Beedle the Bard.

Such Vows can still be dangerous, however. And are probably just not invoked for long-term, or casual contracts in modern times (except perhaps by drunks). But they are certainly out there. Essentially an Unbreakable Vow appears to be simply "cross my heart and hope to die" made literal.

And the Bonder can probably release you from one at any point that seems advisable.



One of our hottest candidates for balognium, in the whole series of course, is the Fidelius charm. There was originally a lengthy section on the Fidelius charm at this point in this essay, but that has been moved into the 'Holy Baloney!' article since Rowling has so, er, *improved* upon the concept in DHs.

This spell, like the Imperius curse has already demonstrated



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a nasty tendency to morph into whatever Rowling seems to think she needs it to be whenever she has decided to deploy it. Regardless of whether each new iteration is consistent with any of the earlier ones.



Legilimency and Occlumency also have a bit of a whiff of bolognium to them, but at this point, that is just as likely to be due to clumsy handling as anything else. None of what we have been shown of these skills so far seems to be beyond the reach of a good explanation.

If we were lucky, I thought we might eventually get one. But we haven't had one yet. And we've already got some major inconsistencies in the handling of it.

Most of which were fairly transparent attempts on Rowling's part to deliberately conceal information in OotP so she could spring it on us in HBP. Which was cheating.

These were compounded in DHs when, upon absolutely no explanation, Harry was once again seeing out of Tom's eyes, and this time even seeing into Tom's mind — which had not ever happened before — while Tom remained completely unaware of the process over the course of the whole book.

But this I think may not be exactly relevant to the issue. Harry was told to study Occlumency to stop the process while it was happening to him, and was later told that Tom had used Occlumency to stop it, from his end. But we were never actually told that the connection between he and Tom Riddle was Legilimency. And indeed the revelation that he was an unintended Horcrux goes a long way to contradict that hypothe-

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sis. Therefore, the issue of Harry's window into Tom Riddle's mind is an issue which will be also explored in the 'Holy Bolognium!' essay which is primarily concerned with the fresh, new, or vastly enhanced bolognium which Rowling deployed in DHs.



An examination of the obscure skills of Occlumency and Legilimency is here, however. Although I am not altogether convinced that either of these skills qualifies as bolognium.

My own take on it, is that Legilimency and Occlumency are closely related skills, but they are not quite the same thing at all, and someone who is a real expert at one of them is unlikely to be as expert in the other, although anyone who can learn either can certainly learn both, and handle both of them well enough to be going on with. Some of the factors that brought me to this conclusion were thrown into slight doubt in HBP, but I am still inclined to suspect that the principle holds in the main. Just not as strongly.

There appeared to be some support for this interpretation by the fact that Snape, who is referred to as a "superb Occlumens" in OotP apparently had to use his wand and speak the invocation for Legilimens in order to attempt to "read" Harry throughout the Occlumency lessons fiasco. (Unless that was just another piece of performance art. Given that the whole Occlumency lesson set-up was yet another of Albus's scams, it probably was.)

That conclusion was undercut in HBP when this turned out, in the aftermath of the Sectumsempra attack on Malfoy, not to be necessary for him in the least. Evidently my original



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impression was merely down to the fact that Rowling wanted to be coy about holding off from officially introducing nonverbal magic until Harry reached his 6th year, even though she's been showing it in use all around the edges of the action from the beginning of the series.

Not to mention that appearing to need to use a wand to perform Legilimency would have lessened Tom's opinion of Snape's skills had he chosen to check in during those lessons. That may have been an impression worth fostering.

And in all examples but two, when Legilimency has been used on him, Harry has been aware of every step of his being read. And in the two incidents when he was not aware, the person reading him was Tom. Who had advantages not available to other wizards.

I seriously doubt that there is any foolish wand waving or silly invocation permitted when Voldemort looks you in the eye and asks you what you've been up to. On the other end of the equation, we have never seen Voldemort waving a wand and announcing; "Legilimens" in order to extract information from anyone he believes has it, and so far as we have been shown, he has always succeeded.

In the same chapter of PS/SS where we first see total "mind control" in action, we also got our first demonstration of what appeared to be Legilimency. And it was a doozy. We did not yet have the information necessary to recognize it for what it was. Then. But we do now.

In that scene, if you will recall, we saw Voldemort force Quirrell to take off the turban and turn around. Then he looked Harry in the eye, taunted him for a moment and then

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demanded he hand over the Stone in his pocket. Harry — so far as we were told — was totally unaware of Voldemort sifting through his memories to arrive at the knowledge that Harry had already retrieved the Stone from the Mirror.

Again, at the end of OotP Voldemort only had to look Harry in the eye to see that his claim that the record of the Prophecy was destroyed was true. And Harry had no sensation of anyone messing with the contents of his head then, either. Very different from the Occlumency lessons with Professor Snape.

But then Voldemort is not an Occlumens, he is a Legilimens.

For that matter, I doubt that Snape gets a chance to wave his wand around when it is time to keep Voldemort from reading his thoughts, either. But, Snape, as we are told, is an Occlumens, but not primarily a Legilimens. And, for that matter, post-HBP it is now clear that Snape never really *\*needed\** to wave his wand about and announce; "Legilimens" in order to read Harry either. He was putting on a show. We still don't know of any internal reason inside the story for why he was so determined to make such a performance of it, but it was certainly a performance.

I also rather suspect that a person may have a natural aptitude for one or the other, much as Harry has a natural aptitude for flying. And if one needs only an aptitude for this general "class" of mind skills, one's early environment may determine the direction in which it develops.

It is blindingly easy to imagine a young Severus Snape trapped in the sort of angry, and possibly violent household that we caught a glimpse of, or even just as a small scrawny kid in a rough neighborhood, learning to erect mental barriers to



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keep anyone from ever getting a handle on something that they could use to hurt him.

It is just as easy to imagine a young Tom Riddle, brilliant, personable (when he chose to be), and ambitious, dropped into the harried, institutional environment of his orphanage, and later, Hogwarts, learning to read others' expectations and mirroring them back in order to manipulate the System to get what he wants, or prying out others' secrets in order to bring pressure to bear on them.

Other children have used both of these methods to cope with whatever situation they were dealt, and both methods work. But some children are much better at it than others.

It is a little surprising that Harry — considering what we've seen of the Dursley household — is not better at the "Snape method" than he is, for he certainly never got the chance to deploy the "Riddle method." Nor was he ever given any real reason to attempt it. In the Dursley's household Harry had no need or wish to learn to read the inner motivations or intentions of others; the Dursleys, after all, conceal nothing of their intentions or motivations regarding *him*. Nor does it seem to have ever been possible for Harry to learn to charm them by showing them what they wanted to see from him. All they have ever wanted to see from him is his absence.

Probably the most heartening thing about these two particular magical capabilities, however, is the fact that unlike Parseltongue, this branch of magic is described to us as being merely "obscure," rather than "rare." So apparently the information is out there, somewhere, and most wizards can probably learn it if they choose to. That it remains obscure despite its

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obvious usefulness suggests to me that it is either very difficult to control well enough to be able to rely upon it, or that there is some other process out there which does 80% of the same thing much more easily (\*cough\* Veritiserum \*cough\*). If so, there is probably something about that remaining 20% of its functionality which has made it so attractive to the Dark Lord. And to his followers.

For one thing, I suspect that Occlumency on a high enough level might be very useful for resisting Dementors.

Particularly if you *expect* to encounter them.

Let alone *work* with them.

We were told in passing in HBP that Harry disagreed with Snape's recommended method for resisting Dementors. We already know that Harry is competent at a very good, if difficult, method to repel Dementors. So what on earth would Snape have been recommending that Harry would disagree with?

Well, I think Occlumency may just be it. Rubbing the boy's nose in the fact that he could not perform it.

Really, consider; if you can wall off your thoughts and feelings well enough, how would a Dementor manage to get a hold on you? Could it tell you apart from a dog? Would it even be able to tell that you are *there*? Remember, we are told that Dementors are blind.

And while the Azkaban escapees are pretty well 'round the twist, some of them are still half-way functional.

Well, maybe we now know why.





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In HBP, Dumbledore does inform the young Riddle that he is not the first, nor will he be the last young wizard who has let his magic run away with him...

Maybe there is a good reason why Albus believes in second chances.

The things you learn, when you listen...

At that point, one really began to wonder about the life and times of young Albus Dumbledore, didn't one?

Not that it was worth giving over the whole 7th book to explore the matter.

But, at nearly 17 Harry may be beyond the age at which such skills are most readily trainable. Although one hoped not. We hadn't heard the last of this issue yet, for all that Rowling seems to have made a concerted attempt to say "Occlumency? What's Occlumency?" all through HBP.

If Harry could learn enough to protect himself, and I very much expected that he would at some point still need to protect himself, he would probably not need to become a Master of this particular branch of magic.

Well, instead, Rowling seems to have dodged the whole issue, and merely had the universe shower him with "special!"

But I certainly wouldn't have put a lot of faith in the likelihood of Tom leaving the connection closed to the end of the series.



And we got a few hints that there might already be another Legilimens, even if not necessarily a Master of the skill, already in play on this particular game board. One who may not have

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learned the skill until he was already in at least his late teens or early 20s.

By the name of Remus John Lupin.

It's from Lupin that we are first told that Snape is "a superb Occlumens." And he states this with a considerable degree of authority and conviction. What is more, as above, when we re-examine previous scenes according to new information, it is hard to miss the handling of Lupin's appearance in the Shrieking Shack at the end of PoA, wherein he stares intently at Black "as if he were trying to read his mind" and then blurts out the truth of Black's substitution with Pettigrew without a word from Black being said. And that is hardly an obvious leap to be making.

In point of fact this wasn't the first time Lupin had pulled that trick. There is no shortage of other incidents of such apparent "mind reading" on Lupin's part throughout the course of that whole book. In fact, it was this sort of thing which served as the basis for our interpretation of Lupin as such a sensitive and perceptive individual in the first place.

Well, just maybe there is just a little *more* to it than mere *sensitivity*.

And if Lupin was reading Harry, Harry wasn't aware of it then, either.

But, given Pettigrew's activities at the time the Potters were involved with the Order of the Phoenix, I would tend to suspect that while Lupin may be a functional Legilimens *now*, he almost certainly was not one then. Unless he felt that there was a need to keep that ability under wraps, even from his friends. He may have already been spying on the werewolves by that time, and



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learned it in preparation for that mission. And, if so, he never *thought* to use it on his friends. Which is understandable. After all, they were his *friends*.

Which did look like it could have been a hopeful sign for Harry's ability to learn the skill at the advanced age of 17. If Harry spent the last part of the upcoming summer with members of the Order, one speculated that Lupin might even serve as one of his teachers. Lupin has a very good track record of teaching Harry advanced magic, and Dumbledore, after all, was no longer in the picture.



Well, we saw how well that worked out. Indeed the whole Order seems to have been reduced to a platoon of spear-carriers to be called in for the final battle. If Rowling hadn't been determined to give us that tacky battle we probably would never have heard of the Order again after the breakup of the wedding in chapter 8.

That's probably one of the reasons *why* she was so determined to give us that tacky so-called battle.

But even if the Legilimens/Occlumens factor is not altogether balognium, there is a bit too much clumsiness in play regarding the depiction of these skills, which I sincerely hoped that Rowling would not compound by intermittently forgetting that they are an active factor in the unfolding of the storyline. Ultimately she seems to have managed adequately in that regard.

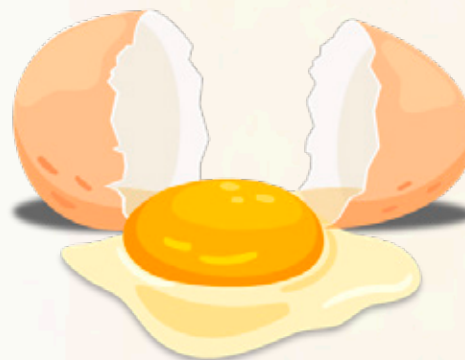
She had pulled that on other matters, however. Fortunately, the person whose primary statements on the subject introduced the largest "disconnect" in some of those matters is one of the

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characters whose judgment was already regarded as severely compromised; Cornelius Fudge.

It was from Fudge that we learned, in the PoA eavesdropping scene that it was officially believed to have been Sirius Black who betrayed the Potters.

This is something that Albus Dumbledore, a Legilimens himself, would probably have hesitated to make an issue of. Dumbledore, of all people ought to have realized that all that might have been necessary would have been for the Potters' Secret Keeper to have been brought before Voldemort, and to meet the Dark Lord's eyes for that particular secret to be "betrayed". It is possibly one of the main reasons why he offered to serve as the Secret Keeper himself, and one now belatedly wonders how he omitted to make the Potters and their friends understand the risk they were taking by refusing his offer.





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If the underlying gentleman's agreement is not to demand that the audience have to swallow more than one piece of balognium per story, (or per volume) then JK Rowling is manifestly no gentleman.

DHs delivers a whole truckload of brand new balognium. As well as "improving" some previously established balognium right up to a whole new level of magnitude.

The truly annoying thing is that a lot of it didn't *have* to be balognium. It could have been explained adequately had Rowling or her editors taken the trouble to think things through, and do it.



One of our hottest candidates for balognium, for the whole series of course, is the Fidelius charm. This spell, like the Imperius curse had already demonstrated a nasty tendency to morph into whatever Rowling seemed to think she needed it to be whenever she decided to use it. Regardless of whether each new iteration was consistent with any of the earlier ones. In DHs she outdid herself.

Before that, she had already given us two distinctly different versions and no admission of any inconsistency. Which is always a bad sign. In DHs she dismissed both of those iterations and added a third, which was even *less* consistent.

Until Rowling answered the FAQ poll question on what happens to a Secret if the Secret Keeper dies, around the beginning of 2006, if a fairly modest amount of human error, and bad planning on the part of the characters could have been applied to the underlying problem as shown, it settled down into being sort-of-reasonably explained. Not after that, though. From that point ever afterwards, it's balognium, to the core.



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The Fidelius charm complies with one of the first rules of balognium in that it does seem to be an element which is absolutely necessary for the story to function. Without the Fidelius Charm a great many declarative statements suddenly become subject to a lot of uncertainty and we lose one of the primary elements of the backstory.

The original version of the Fidelius, to which we were introduced in PoA, was stated as being an enormously complex charm which could hide specific knowledge within a single living soul. If a Secret had not been revealed, no one but the Secret's Keeper could find it, and no one but the Secret Keeper could reveal it.

Once the Secret Keeper had revealed it, it could be found.

Apparently, it could be found by anyone. Once Pettigrew had betrayed the Potters to Voldemort (and apparently *only* to Voldemort), no one had any difficulty finding them. Or their bodies, evidently. Dumbledore could send Hagrid to Godric's Hollow via portkey as soon as Snape reported that his Dark mark had disappeared. Hagrid had no trouble finding Harry in the ruins and getting him out. The Magical Catastrophe team, or for that matter the Muggle emergency crews had no difficulty finding the bodies of James and Lily. The Secret had been revealed to Voldemort and wasn't a secret any more.

And that worked perfectly well, if one ignored the fact that Dumbledore seemed to know a lot more about what had actually happened at that house that night than he had any right to. And the problem of Albus Dumbledore's unexplained omniscience hadn't anything to do with the Fidelius Charm itself.

This was our standard interpretation of the matter from the





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release of PoA in 1999, until the opening of OotP in 2003.



In OotP, however, Fidelius suddenly didn't work that way at all.

Dumbledore was the Secret Keeper of the Order of the Phoenix and the location of their Headquarters was in his Keeping. He could reveal this Secret to any number of people and any of them could find it.

But it was still a Secret.

Only the ones he told about it could find it. Still, they *all* could find it.

Now, right off the top this contradicts Flitwick's version, which states that as long as the Secret Keeper chose not to divulge the Secret it could not be found. Flitwick says nothing about *sharing* the Secret.

But then while Flitwick is a Charms expert, he wasn't identified as a member of the Order of the Phoenix — or at least we'd never been told he was.

Still, he was out patrolling the halls with Order members (and *only* Order members, no other unaffiliated Hogwarts staff seem to have been patrolling) in HBP.

BUT, if the Secret can be *shared*, that raises the question of how it can ever be "divulged?" Are you supposed to take out an ad in the PROPHET? Once you've gotten custody of a Secret how do you get rid of the bloody thing if telling it to people doesn't *do* it?

Most secrets aren't expected to be kept *forever*, after all.



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So (remaining back in 2003 mindset for a bit longer, here) how does one explain this when you try to relate it to the Potters? Pettigrew is only known to have revealed the Secret to Lord Voldemort, after which both he and Lord Voldemort disappeared. Although he must have revealed it to Sirius Black as well, since Sirius rode off to Godric's Hollow as soon as he got to Peter's hideout and found him missing. The Potters probably weren't dead yet, at that moment. And, for that matter, Harry was still alive. Why wasn't *he* still hidden?

So why didn't the Secret remain secure, as a Secret? If the Potters' location was hidden in Pettigrew's soul, and the Secret Keeper can share the Secret with selected people without disturbing its security, why did revealing it to Voldemort enable everyone and his House Elf to find the Potters at any time they chose to thereafter? For that matter, the house remains accessible to the entire wizarding community, effectively being maintained as a shrine. We've seen it.

The Fidelius is supposed to be foolproof. What gives?

Well, that's the issue isn't it? Nothing is ever foolproof in the hands of sufficiently clever fools. And James Potter and Sirius Black were both *very* clever fools.

The first thing that we can say for certain is that if Dumbledore didn't know about the substitution of Pettigrew for Black, then he was not likely to have been the person who actually cast the Fidelius charm (barring the use of polyjuice, thank you Swythyy). Nor is it clear whether he had been let in on the Secret of the Potters' location himself, since it would then have had to be Peter who did that.

Which means the Secret was definitely *broken*, not *shared*.



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Well, okay. I do believe that it was Dumbledore who cast the charm that hid #12 Grimmauld Place. He cast it, and he was that Secret's Keeper. This just stands to reason. If you really want to keep something secret, you keep it to yourself. And we already know that he offered to do the same for the Potters. They turned him down. The Weasleys, both Arthur and Bill, took a leaf out of Albus's book when it was time for them to go into hiding. They kept their own Secrets, secret.

(Which doesn't explain how a dying Dobby was able to Apparate the rescues from Malfoy Manor to Shell Cottage, if Shell Cottage's location was Secret-kept.)

For that matter, maybe that's the way it's always worked. Which would mean that it was Pettigrew who cast the Fidelius which was supposed to protect the Potters. Given that Pettigrew was far more competent as a wizard than anyone is prepared to credit him with, I can believe it. But in that case, why didn't they run a Priori Incantatum on Sirius Black's wand and determine that that wand *didn't* cast the Fidelius? It had only been a week since the Fidelius was cast. Or *had* Sirius's wand cast it? They could have traded wands as well as duties.

After all, before Book 7 wands tended to work for whoever happened to be holding them.

And, considering that we've been given every reason to believe that Albus Dumbledore was definitely hot stuff where it comes to magic, maybe the version of the Fidelius he was using in '95 *wasn't* the same version that the Potters used in '81. Maybe it had been *modified*.



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But we don't know that, and if that's the explanation, Rowling ought to have at least mentioned it in passing, and she absolutely never did.

What I was originally more inclined to suspect was that while the Secret Keeper can voluntarily "share" a Secret (even if he shares it out of knuckling under to pressure) if someone pulls it out of him involuntarily, by magical force or guile, the charm will break. And that is what I thought may have happened with Pettigrew.

Well, that reading no longer seems to play in the wake of DHs and it's new delivery of Fidelius-labeled balognium. But let's explore the issue a bit further as limited by the 1999 vs. 2003 debate. And my original interpretation of what I thought might have happened back in 1981.



Back when Dumbledore made his offer he knew that it was extremely unlikely that he would ever be confronted directly by Lord Voldemort, and that even if he were, master Legilimens or not, Voldemort would probably not be able to pry the Secret out of Albus Dumbledore's soul, through that soul's twinkling blue windows...

That is a detail that everyone, including Rowling, keeps leaving out of the reckoning. Voldemort is allegedly a master Legilimens. And he has no compunction about using it. Neither Sirius Black NOR Peter Pettigrew would have been able to keep that Secret once they were brought before Lord Voldemort and he established eye contact. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, Voldemort could see right through those windows to what





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he wanted. Even if the Secret Keeper was sincerely trying to conceal the information.

Or so I believed. The obstinate silence on this issue in canon suggests that I was applying a level of potential nuance to the proceedings that Rowling never anticipated.

Still, from everything that Black ever said on the subject, it is blindingly obvious that he *\*hadn't a clue\** regarding this particular possibility. Evidently, if it *is* a possibility, Dumbledore did not fully explain the matter to the Potters.

Which, of course, is entirely in keeping with what we have always seen of Dumbledore, and his two biggest weaknesses as a leader. The first of these is that he typically doesn't take action until it is virtually too late, and the second is that he doesn't share information that *needs* to be shared, *when* it needs to be shared. And, while he may tell his agents about a danger that he knows he is sending them into (or not, as we have since discovered), he doesn't bother to warn people about the dangers that he is offering to protect them from.

So he makes his offer. The Potters turn him down. They may not have ever heard of the Fidelius charm before that point. Flitwick does claim that it is rather obscure.

So, they probably went and did a little light research on it immediately afterwards, and realized that it was a pretty cool idea after all.

So they send off a message that Sirius is going to be their Secret Keeper, and turn around and perform the charm among themselves, without asking anyone's advice. And, quite possibly, they botched it.

Not the spellcasting. The spellcasting went off without a

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hitch. They screwed up the setup. And complex spells like the Fidelius probably depend heavily upon their setup.

If James or Lily had cast the charm and kept the secret themselves, then they could have told a few trusted confidants their location, and those people would have all been able to find them — but they couldn't have betrayed them even if they had wanted to. We saw that Moody and the advance guard could lead Harry right to the steps of Grimmauld Place, but he couldn't even see the house until he read the address in Dumbledore, the Secret Keeper's own hand. That's the way it's *supposed* to work.

But the Potters didn't think of that. They were too much in love with their Boy's Own Adventure cleverness and were playing at intrigue. They told Dumbledore and everyone else who was in a position to be told that they had decided to hand the Secret of their whereabouts over to a trusted friend. With results known to all.

I had originally thought that it was probably Lily who actually performed the charm, and they worked the whole plan out between the four of them, herself and James and Sirius and Peter. But if the Keeper is the one who must do the casting, then it would have been Pettigrew. It's clear that Lupin did not know about the switch. Whether he even knew of their intentions to go under a Fidelius is debatable. Sirius, after all, was convinced he was the spy. And if Remus was already spying on the werewolves, he may have asked not to be told.

And once it was done, Dumbledore couldn't have found any of them to discuss the matter, and was left on the outside having to just hope for the best



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So, from what we were stuck having to build a coherent picture from in 2003, I concluded that the failure of the spell was not due to the fact that Peter merely revealed the Secret to Voldemort. Or not because he revealed it voluntarily. Voldemort got access to the Secret by stealing it.

Which broke the charm. Completely.

Of course, act to what we knew at that time, the spell may have failed with the death of its caster, if James or Lily had been the caster. Rowling had handed us a couple of pronouncements that spells die with their casters. But she has fairly consistently managed to always show us the opposite. (Why would Bill Weasley need to be a wizard to recover treasure if that's the case, eh? The casters of those protective spells in Egypt are all long dead.) For several years many of us thought that it was certain that the spell would have failed with the death of the Secret Keeper. Act to Flitwick, under the Fidelius Charm, the Secret is hidden in a *living* soul. With the death of the Keeper, the soul might release its Secret.

But when Rowling, having killed off Albus, but not being quite finished with #12 Grimmauld Place yet, answered her FAQ poll in early 2006, she pitched that whole concept to the level of being totally unworkable, because she was determined to have it both ways.

With the death of the Keeper, either the Secret is still safe, or is isn't.

Rowling clearly needed it to still be safe so the kids could hide out at #12 for an undetermined amount of time. But she wanted

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the impression of it *not* being safe so she could work up some bogus suspense over the presumed threat of Snape telling the DEs where they were.

She pointed out that the death of a Secret Keeper ought not to be a factor, or people would have been killing Secret Keepers to turn Secrets loose for centuries as a matter of course (conveniently forgetting that not all kept Secrets are based on the *locations* of things). But her explanation that the death of the Secret Keeper changes nothing, was highly unsatisfying. In fact it introduces probabilities which were completely unacceptable.

It is possible that this load of DHs-commissioned nonsense was belatedly drafted out in view of the lack of acceptance for the "official" explanation. If so, it is a pity that Rowling evidently couldn't find anyone in her editorial team that she trusted enough to discuss the matter with and draft out something that actually worked.

Like cutting to the chase and telling us that the death of the Keeper really *does* change nothing. Instead of telling us so and then immediately explaining about how "changing nothing" really means "changing *everything*".

If it really changed *nothing*, then as long as anyone with whom a kept Secret has been shared is *alive*, then the Secret is still secret. If the Keeper is dead, those people will still be *just* as unable to tell anyone else about it as they were when he was alive. The Secret, effectively has now been retired from ever being released. It will be a Secret *in perpetuity*.

*Not* that they are all suddenly now Keepers rather than just Sharers and can now all tell anyone about it they choose. That is *not* "changing nothing."



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But if you do *that*, you can't play the threats of betrayal card.



And besides; think about it for a moment. If the death of Albus Dumbledore leaves the Secret in precisely the same state it was at the time of his death, then where do we go from there? I agree that this could be convenient for the 7th book, since it gives Harry a secure hideout once he comes of age and leaves the Dursleys. And he would be unlikely to find uninvited guests waiting for him when he finally got there. (Unless Snape brought Draco in blindfolded and stashed him there to be safe.)

But the war is going to be over at some point. And if Harry survives, then until he can afford to move somewhere else, Harry is probably going to be living there.

After all, he can hardly sell it if no one can *find* it.

And he can't invite any new friends over. Unless he leads them in blindfolded or something. Every time they visit. And if he and his cousin Ginny (yes, act to the Black family tapestry sketch Ginny is his cousin. Third cousin, admittedly, but still a cousin) do marry and start a family, their kids will never be able to find their way home by themselves.

Which could probably be why the spell is so obscure. It comes with major potential risks.

So she really needed to come up with a way that a kept Secret can be canceled — by someone who wasn't the caster of the charm. Without having to wait until everyone who once knew the Secret was dead. And she couldn't be arsed to do that.

She clearly felt she needed to insert the possibility of someone who knows the Secret bringing someone else into the house, how-

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ever. Because I think she always intended that the trio be forced out pretty much in the same way that they eventually were.

But she never actually established that someone who was inadvertently brought to the house would ever be able to find their way back. We were just left to assume as much. And Harry never even had the common sense to call Kreacher and ask him whether their stowaway came back and brought his friends with him, or we might have been spared the endless camping trip. Because it seems pretty evident that Yaxley didn't return. Unless he did and then ordered Kreacher off to Hogwarts. And why would Yaxley do that? And why would Kreacher go? *Yaxley* wasn't his Master.

\*Le Sigh\*



Not to mention *why* we later encountered Kreacher at the Battle when we hadn't encountered him since the retreat from #12 the previous autumn. Who gave him instruction to *go there*?



It was at one stage of the series pointed out to me by a correspondent that there was an additional possibility regarding the Potters' failed Fidelius which I had completely overlooked.

What happens if the "object" that is protected by the Secret is destroyed? Was it the Potters *themselves* who were hidden by the Fidelius Charm, as Flitwick — who is a Charms expert, but may have been out of the loop — seems to think, or was it *their home*?

Is that why the house was wrecked? Did Pettigrew blow it



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up so the Fidelius could be broken without anyone discovering who had actually been the Secret Keeper?

I thought that perhaps it could be. That would solve a few of our problems. It's a considerable mental leap to be making with a highly complex and unfamiliar spell, but Pettigrew is a lot cleverer than anyone was ever willing to give him credit for being. Unfortunately, now that we've been there, we also know that the house was not *destroyed*. The explosion only blew out a wall on the upper story. The house was still mostly habitable and could have been repaired.

At this point we also still do not know why the house was damaged in the first place. A "rebounding" AK would not do it. The "rebounding" AK (although I flatly disbelieve that that spell was actually an AK) hit Tom and destroyed *him*.

Well, let's start over. We've seen that AK causes damage to inanimate objects, but from what we've *seen* it do, it doesn't cause explosions, and it wouldn't wreck a house. Although it might put a hole in it somewhere. There *was* a hole in the Potter's house, but a rebounding spell would only do that if it found no other target. And it *did* find a target. Two of them, in fact.

It has also never been established that AK is the kind of a spell which bounces when it meets an inanimate object, let alone a living target. We have seen it damage inanimate objects. But not bounce off them. Admittedly, rebounding spells do appear to do damage in excess of their original intent, but to propose that the spell bounced from Harry, to Tom, and then to the exterior wall of the room, growing more powerful at each rebound simply does not fit anything we have seen nor anything we have been told. And why should it have rebounded

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from Tom in any case?

And when *whatever* Tom threw at Harry rebounded, his own body was completely destroyed. Gone. Vanished. AK leaves bodies.

Unmarked bodies. It does not vaporize them.

Now, admittedly, that does sound like an awful lot of energy being released in an enclosed space to me. Maybe the people who've been drawing a straight line between those two dots and claiming that the house was destroyed by the rebounding curse have been right all along. It just was not destroyed by the curse *hitting* the house. The curse didn't hit the *house*.

But in tht case, how did Harry survive with only a cut on his forehead? It still all refuses to add up to anything more than a definite maybe.



And nobody ever caught up to Pettigrew (who has to have been there at some point to collect the wand) and thought to ask him just what happened.

Although I thought that we were given a maybe-hint in HBP. Later undermined by the nonsense we were handed in DHs.

Dumbledore speaks as though he was convinced that Voldemort intended to create his last Horcrux from Harry's death. And that was certainly a tenable hypothesis. It would certainly appear to fit the pattern which had been forming regarding Tom Riddle's methods by that point. It would also explain the obvious connection between Tom and Harry which we've known about since Book 1.

But in the light of DHs we suddenly are supposed to accept



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that we have no compelling reason to continue to believe it. Rowling clearly forgot all about that plot thread. In that “flash-back”—or whatever it was—Tom certainly was not thinking along the lines of creating a Horcrux when Harry went back to Godric’s Hollow inside the Dark Lord’s head. By this time I tend to suspect that what we actually got was Tom fantasizing about how things *\*ought\** to have gone when he was there to kill the Potters back in 1981, rather than remembering what actually happened.

And although Voldemort almost certainly killed James by means of the AK, if he threw two separate spells at Harry and Lily, the spell that he threw at Harry did not register in the Priori Incantatum which we got a playback of in the graveyard at the end of GoF. The replay of echoes skipped right over anything that he may have thrown at Harry. And it wasn’t because the spell didn’t work. Because even if the spell didn’t do what Tom *intended* it to, it definitely didn’t simply *fail*.

Unless what he threw at Harry is what actually killed *Lily*, instead. Which I thought might have been where we were being misled. *That* hypothesis actually plays very well in light of my interpretations on just what principles may be invoked in the creation of a Horcrux.

But then (as if she hadn’t already done sufficient damage to her own credibility) in DHs, Rowling allegedly took us into Tom’s memory of the whole event and nothing in that recollection plays according to any rational pattern at all. Nothing in it works according to the way that magic has been set up to work in this universe. Nor anything that would explain the creation of the Harrycrux. At that point she was still determined to con-

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ceal the existence of the Harrycrux from both the characters and her readers. And it all comes across as completely bogus.

Indeed, about the only thing she accomplished by that exercise was to throw us another cheap joke of the Muggle Trick-or-Treaters calling out; “Nice costume, mister!”

And none of it matches anything that Albus had speculated concerning that incident in the previous book. And we cannot even know whether Albus was merely wrong, or if he was lying again.

Frankly, I’m inclined to call Rowling the liar. Albus’s version at least made *sense*.

Or to conclude that by the time Harry got dragged down that stretch of memory lane, that Tom was hallucinating the whole sequence, and none of it had actually *happened*.

And then, finally, she hustles us past the whole issue with a comment that the Fidelius Charm must have failed when James and Lily died, because Harry (and evidently any number of other wizards) could see the house afterwards.

Excuse me, but wasn’t much of the the whole point of the Fidelius charm to hide *Harry*? Harry didn’t die.

My brain hurts.



Actually, sounding like something lifted from an early draft can be said for rather a lot of the magic deployed over the course of DHs. And a good deal of the rest of it sounds like one-trick-pony patch jobs stuffed in to serve a single purpose where the demands of the plot didn’t fit anything that she had lying around already, and she couldn’t be bothered to stop and think



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out any solution out which would have blended in seamlessly.

Let's take a break from the Fidelius and look at a couple of other pieces of stupidity that we are expected to "just accept" in this book.

Like "flesh memory." Is there any reader whatsoever who really thinks that was necessary? Surely there was some way that the Peverill ring could have been concealed inside the old Snitch with a way for Harry to open it that the Ministry wouldn't figure out. For that matter, why did the legacy have to go through the Ministry?

You would think that with all the Staff, and all the Order to call upon, and a year in which to prepare for his death, it can't be too much to expect that Albus might have managed to find a somewhat more private messenger.

Plus, that Snitch is standard school athletic equipment. For a sport which appears to be played in gloves. Why would it need flesh memory?

For that matter, what does this say about James having stolen one of the School's snitches to sit around playing with it bare handed? Was he deliberately tampering with the equipment? (Rowling told us years ago that James had been a Chaser not a Seeker, and it is a foul for anyone other than a Seeker to catch the Snitch, so what would be the *point*?)

However, thankfully, the actual plot truly does not really depend upon the fact that the old Snitch has a "flesh-memory" of Harry Potter. Therefore we are not forced to explore the balonium potential of the flesh-memory of a Snitch in greater depth and can merely relegate it as yet one more poorly handled and ill-conceived detail in a book which has far too many of them.



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Or like Snape's silver doe Patronus. This whole section is **LARGELY** repeated (with a couple of very minor adjustments) from the 'Transit and Communications' essay since it is equally relevant in both places. It is probably mentioned elsewhere in the collection as well. It bears repeating.

The implied message in HBP is that Tonks's Patronus had become a wolf because of her fixation on Lupin, which was essentially confirmed by the (interview, not canon) statement that Lily's Patronus became a doe because of her relationship with James. Which was tacky, but comprehensible.

So will you please explain to me where the "single, very *happy* memory" comes in that would explain *Snape's* doe?

Did he even know that Lily's Patronus was a doe? Or was her Patronus a actually stag, in honor of her looking to James as her protector? He certainly never knew that James was a stag Animagus. Although since we do now have Minerva's example of a Patronus mirroring her Animagus form. Maybe James's Patronus would have been a stag. In which case, since they are unique, Lily's probably *is* supposed to have been a doe.

While we're at it, Rowling never showed *us* that Lily was even able to produce a Patronus — although she probably could. She was a Charms whiz, and she was in the Order, after all.

**BUT**, if Lily's Patronus changed to a stag, or a doe, after she and James got together, what had it been before? They didn't get together until they were finally into 7th year. Lily hadn't given Snape the time of day for more than a year before that. How would he know what her new Patronus was? Or if she





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even had one. Did they learn Patronuses in DADA class, and he saw it then? In which case why was it so important for the DEs not to know *he* had one? (Acto Rowling in an interview.) For that matter, the Dementors were supposedly under the control of the Ministry and did the Ministry's bidding. I'm not convinced that the Ministry would ever approve of the school teaching the students how to *resist arrest*.

Dumbledore taught the speaking Patronus to the Order, and he taught it to Snape as well, but Snape had no direct contact with the Order until Harry's Year 5.

So how was Snape supposed to know about Lily's frapping doe, anyway?

And, besides, are we being asked to believe that a silver doe in memory of the woman whose death he *caused* is produced by a *happy* memory? I'm sorry, Jo. But you've fumbled the logic ball again. Majorly.

Or did Rowling simply *forget* that a Patronus is supposed to be generated by a *HAPPY* memory. What's happy about having your best friend reject you — in public, during an event in which you were being publicly humiliated — and then you crown it all by managing to inadvertently get her killed? Rowling seems to have a very odd idea of what constitutes happiness.

Or more likely she just thought the image of a ghostly silver doe was wonderfully mysterious and evocative. Which in all fairness it was. But it makes *no sense*.



The plot *does* depend upon Horcruxes, however, and while they were never *quite* rendered into balonium, they came



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awfully close. Particularly the talking Locket. I flatly *don't* believe *that*.



And then DHs was released.

And the whole reasoning behind the Fidelius charm became completely, irrevocably unworkable.

Yes, we're back to the Fidelius.

Where to start?

Well, in the first place after implying in her website FAQ answer that the death of a Secret Keeper effectively changes nothing, she lobbed another spitball at us with the information that now that the Secret Keeper was dead, all the persons who had been privy to the Secret rather than simply continuing to *know* the Secret, had now been promoted to Secret Keepers in their own right. With the power to reveal the information to others.

I certainly wouldn't say that this "changes nothing," myself. This is logic on the level of; "Freedom is Slavery."

Admittedly, I can see this as a reasonably plausible method of letting a Secret gradually work its way back into public domain. If every 2nd-generation Secret Keeper tells whoever they choose about the Secret, then upon their death the people they told presumably do not forget it, and are similarly able to share the information. Assuming the Secret still matters to anyone, by the time the secret has passed through a couple of "generations" of Keepers it is probably no longer much of a secret.

But even the handling of this was botched. It is clear that the only reason for changing the way the spell worked was so that





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the trio could be forced out of #12 and into the endless camping trip by having a dramatically hitchhiking, side-alonging DE be inadvertently “escorted” to the doorstep.

But would it have even *done* that? Sure, Yaxley *might* have been able to get in. *Maybe*. And *possibly* to find his way back on his own. *Maybe*. He had been escorted to the very door by a legitimate Secret Keeper. That’s allegedly how it works. *Maybe*.

Or, *maybe*, once they Apparated away again, leaving him on the doorstep, if he descended the steps to the sidewalk and turned around, he would have not been able to see the house. None of them had told him the address, after all. Or told him *whose* house it was. They’d taken him somewhere, but he had no information of where it was.

Even if he’d opened the door and stepped inside (and met up with Moody’s lame, tongue-tying “security” spell — and why is that spell still running if Moody is dead?) he still wouldn’t have known where he was. And Kreachur wasn’t on the official list of Secret Sharers even though he lived there, so even if Yaxley had questioned him I’m not convinced that once he left he would have been able to find his way back.

But that still wouldn’t have made *him* a Secret Keeper. At the very most, he only was someone who now shared the secret, having been “told” it by someone with the authority to do so. None of them were dead yet. He couldn’t have brought the rest of the DEs in with him. He couldn’t have even told them where it was. That’s how it *works*.

So they made that panicky escape and Ron’s nasty splinch for *nothing*.

They ought to have obliviated him and just left him there to

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be picked up as a vagrant by the Muggle police, since they’d already demonstrated that they don’t give squat about the welfare of bystanders.



They should have at least called Kreachur, once they got away, asked him whether Yaxley had managed to get in, and told him to let them know when the coast was clear, gone back and lain in wait for Yaxley when/if he showed up again. And taken one DE out of commission at least.

For that matter, there were three of them and one of him. Couldn’t they have overpowered him at the time? I suspect that this would have no doubt led to a potentially interesting discussion of what they were supposed to *do* with him when they had him. I doubt that Harry would have agreed to kill him.

They could have had Kreachur contact someone in the Order to catch him and take charge of him. Or, like I say, Obliviate him at the very least.

And the question was never really addressed about the fact that Snape, who was now one of the Secret Keepers, and who could presumably have led the whole pack of DEs there to try to capture Harry, and who moreover had pretty clearly already been there and had searched the house, still didn’t *do* it?

And no one considers this as a relevant factor?

And, for that matter, where was the follow-up?



While we’re at it; Harry has already made peace with Kreachur, and Kreachur is behaving like a devotedly loyal House Elf.



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Doesn't the responsibility go both ways? Doesn't our "heroic" (it says in the fine print) protagonist even consider calling his servant out of a house where the security has been compromised? Not even to ask him whether the DEs have managed to get in? Not even to tell him to protect himself by going somewhere else where he would be safe? Why did Kreachur later turn up at Hogwarts, anyway? Who sent him there? Wouldn't it have made sense to have shown us this much \*on stage\*?

For that matter, couldn't Harry have summoned Kreachur, and have sent him to Hogwarts, and made arrangements for him to bring them food from the kitchens?

And maybe information on Snape and the Carrows, when he could get it?

After all, not being seen is the mark of a good House Elf. For that matter, would the Carrows even take notice of a House Elf? *They* wouldn't recognize Kreachur.

That might have been a bit more *productive* than mooning over Ginny's name where it showed up on the Marauder's Map.

Hell's bells, these are *obvious* actions to take in response to the situation. They are not difficult to think of. Not if you are brighter than a stick of wood, anyway.



Which brings us to those amazing, semi-sentient sticks of wood.

They didn't *have* to be balogneum.

They really didn't.

So, what *about* those all-too-clever sticks of wood.

It was obvious that something tricky to do with a wand was

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always going figure in the final outcome. We weren't given Ollivander and his "the wand chooses the wizard" in Book 1 as local color. Nor were we reminded of the matter by Ollivander in Book 4 by accident. Wandlore, and probably wand ownership has always been on the table.

But "tricky" doesn't *have* to equate with balogneum. It needed better groundwork, and the initial clue placement needed better follow-through.

We got no indication from Ron that he had any trouble using Charlie's old wand until he broke it and tried to mend it with spellotape. We got no comment, not even in passing that his new wand in Book 3 worked significantly better than the old one. That would have been a nice clue, and I think would have given nothing of importance away if we had been given one.

For that matter, it might have been nice if Neville had dropped the information that he was also using a legacy wand at some point earlier than the climax of OotP. Or if someone in the DA had accidentally picked up someone else's wand by mistake in one of their marathon sessions of everyone disarming each other and had trouble using it.

However, we also were informed by Ollivander that issues of wand lore operate according to "subtle" laws. Excuse me, but what was *subtle* about the handling of wand behavior in DHs?



That's the real problem, isn't it? It would be easy enough to accept that the Elder Wand, and its behavior is unique. Particularly if Rowling had ever turned loose the hint that there was a legendary super-wand somewhere out there earlier in



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the series. The European wandmaker Gregorovitch's existence is slipped to us in Book 4 so the hunt for the Elder Wand was almost certainly already on the menu by then, (indeed, I read somewhere online that the original title for Book 7 was 'HARRY POTTER AND THE ELDER WAND') but we heard nothing of the wand itself until we got the story of the three brothers. And, imho, that was introducing us to it rather too late. We did not need to know of its supposed qualities before then, but I really think we did need to know of its *existence*.

Ron certainly knew about it. He'd read Beedle. Why didn't he say something.

I have already stated elsewhere my own opinion that it all might have played better if Professor Binns had dismissed the existence of the Elder wand (probably under one of its other names) at the same time that he dismissed the existence of the Chamber of Secrets. Indeed it might have played very well indeed for Binns to have established a pattern of dismissing the existence of legendary artifacts, occurrences, and spells over the trio's five years in his class. Sometimes rightfully so, although possibly never proven. Sometimes fairly resoundingly *not*.

But we lost any hope of subtle when we started suddenly getting qualities which might have been applicable to a "unique" Elder Wand applied with a trowel to every wand in sight. If the laws are *subtle*, they probably are subtle enough to present little difficulty under most cases. I think that Rowling thoroughly "overwrote" the business of wands that don't cooperate with owners that they haven't "chosen" themselves.

Let alone turning them all into sleazy little wooden bimbos who go off happily with anyone who can take them away from

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their previous holder. This confused matters rather than clarifying them.

And, unfortunately, doing that rendered the whole concept into balognium. Which it *didn't* need to be.



The original premise that wands choose their wizards could be worked with seamlessly. The premise that someone else's wand would never work as well for you as one that "chose" you (i.e., was a proper "match" for you in the first place) could be equated to someone else's spectacles not working as well for you as your own, even if you can see pretty well through them. As I drafted out in 'The Art and Science of Wandmaking', the wood and the core of a properly fitted wand resonate together at a frequency of magic that matches yours and gives you a better performance. No real problem with any of that, and nothing that we were shown in Books 1–6 seems to have any problem with that interpretation.

Suddenly in Book 7 *all* wands are suddenly the Elder Wand. Wooden bimbos who will go off with anyone who can take them away from their previous owner. Ergo: the wand chooses the wizard *only* until a *better* wizard comes along and expresses an interest. This is backwards. Only the Elder Wand ought to be the Elder Wand.

And for that matter even the Elder Wand doesn't need to behave like that. If Rowling hadn't been bankrupt of imagination by then, she'd have worked it out by some other rationale.

Which also reels in the unexplored thread of just what did Albus intend by his claim that he had intended for Snape to



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have the Elder Wand. Just how was *that* supposed to play out?

Albus probably knew that Tom would want to find a new, better wand to use against Harry after the tug-of-war in the graveyard went against him. He also knew that Gellert Grindelwald was still alive and that there had been rumors back around the start of his rise for power that he had acquired a very famous and powerful wand. There was every chance that Tom would discover those rumors. After all, some of Tom's followers were from the geographic area that Gellert had ruled until Tom finished school. Indeed, although we are never told whether Albus learned of Tom's first foray into the forests of Albania, according to Harry, Tom is now supposed to have actually been in the area just after time that Grindelwald's defeat took place (not that I believe Harry. I say Tom went there after killing Hepzibah, not before), and, given the sort of wizard that Tom tends to hang out with, he might have already heard the rumors himself. Albus must have known that it was only a matter of time before Tom would be on the trail of the Elder Wand.

Actually, if Tom were as smart as people keep trying to claim he once was, he would have heard those rumors, and we'd *know* why he seemed to be afraid to face Albus Dumbledore.

But so long as Gellert was alive Albus knew that there was a better than average chance that Tom would realize that Albus had taken charge of the Elder Wand when he had defeated Gellert.

So what was supposed to come of passing the wand to Snape? He does not appear to have filled Snape in on the fact that his wand was the Elder Wand. You would have thought that would have mattered. Unless he simply thought that Snape would

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have a better chance of holding onto it than Draco Malfoy.

Did he even intend for Snape to keep the Wand? Or was Harry (whose tendency to use Expelliarmus first is pretty well known) supposed to take it from Snape, giving him all three of the Hallows? Albus had already made a point of insisting that Snape was to seek Harry out before the final confrontation to give him his last message. Was a wand exchange supposed to be a part of that meeting? It's beyond obvious that he did intend that Harry be in a position to take charge of that wand.

Or did he intend something else? We have no clue.



In the event, what he appears to have done by this particular facet of his orchestration of his own murder was to deliberately set Snape up to die. Much as he had effectively set up Moody (or anyone else who was unlucky) to die in the escape from Privet Drive, and possibly Emmeline Vance to die the summer earlier.

Plus, we also have a considerable question as to whether Albus was ever the rightful "Master" of the Elder Wand in the first place.

Gellert did his bit by claiming that *he* had never "had" the mastery. I believe him. He had no reason to lie. He stole the thing, he hexed Gregorovitch as he escaped, but he didn't kill Gregorovitch to get it, or win it in a battle. We don't know that Albus ever had the Mastery of it, either. He certainly doesn't come out and claim to have had.

*"I was fit to own the Elder Wand, and not boast of it, and not to kill with it. I was permitted to tame it and to use it, because I took it, not for gain, but to save others from it."*



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That really doesn't come out and say that he was the *Master* of it, does it? It almost comes across as if he was concealing the fact that the mastery of that Wand had ceased years earlier. Or *boasting* that if there was a mastery of that wand that \*he\* did not have it.

In fact that whole speech was a piece of boasting from beginning to end, pure and simple.

All of which more and more convinces me that there probably never was a "mastery" of that wand to take. Very few people seem to have managed to hold onto it very long, did they? But that's an issue for a different essay.

Of course since we have to shower Harry Stu with ever more evidence of "special" obviously at the end of the story Harry had won the Mastery and uses it to fix his old wand that he likes so much better, and which was otherwise unrepairable.

Being awarded fabulous artifacts that he has no desire for, or interest in using, seems to be quite the continuing theme when it comes to Harry.



The LiveJournalist known as Swythyv and I were kicking this around for the last few weeks before one of my Halloween updates, and poking at the Hallows (which are another bit of balognium to examine) from a number of different directions. It all makes me really wish I wrote fanfic, because the possibilities are just about endless.

Once I had time to think about it, my conclusions surfaced in the essay entitled; 'The Power He "Knows Not"' in the Missed Opportunities collection. But to recap:

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I think insofar as reconciling a variant of the interreaction between Harry, Tom, and the Elder Wand which would actually read goes, the thing that probably needs to be kept in mind is that the Elder Wand is supposed to be *unique*.

What is needed isn't a wand which will go off and obey just anyone. What is needed is a wand which flatly refuses to cooperate with *Tom*. One that chooses Harry because he *isn't* Tom. One that, when offered the choice, would kill the soul fragment that IS Tom — and not touch Harry.

As I say above, Rowling overwrote the wand business when she started applying what were supposed to be subtle laws with a trowel to every wand in sight. It would have worked better if she had scaled it back a bit and had given us a bit more discussion *about* the Elder Wand after they figured it out that this was what Tom was searching for. The thing is supposed to be legendary for heaven's sake. There have got to be some attributed qualities to it. It would have been something relevant to chew on during the endless camping trip.

But in any case, we know that wands clearly relate to their holders on some level, since they supposedly "choose" their (first) owners. And magic appears to be an attribute of the soul, so when a wizard channels his magic through his wand he is engaging in a fairly intimate process. It probably isn't that big of a stretch to postulate that wands are reacting to on some level with their holder's souls.

What Swythyv and I came up with is that they don't (or at least the Elder Wand doesn't) particularly like *incomplete* souls. The soul, as Slughorn insists, is supposed to remain intact. Given its reputation, the Elder wand can hardly have an issue



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with damaged souls, but it may expect that all of the pieces are supposed to remain present in the same body.

We've been getting hints that magic is soul-based, or at least an attribute of the soul ever since CoS. Indeed, ever since PS/SS. Harry presumably wasn't born a Parselmouth after all. Neither was Ginny. And yet she was directing a basilisk through the school when she was under Tom's control, and even though Harry clearly wasn't possessed, he was still able to chat up a boa constrictor in the zoo. What do Harry and Ginny have in common here?

We got one major hint with Nearly Headless Nick's little talk at the end of OotP where he assures Harry that only witches and wizards are capable of manifesting as ghosts. The other shoe drops in HBP when Snape officially identifies a ghost as the imprint of a departed soul. Clearly there is something about the souls of wizards which distinguishes them from the souls of Muggles. And, given that they are basically both one species, the only thing that is a viable candidate for that difference is the ability to channel magic.

Ergo: it is a tenable hypothesis to conclude that magic is connected to a wizard's soul, and that his wand is, in a very practical manner, his "soul mate"



Tom's old yew wand was with him every step of the way as he butchered his soul. And it actively assisted him to do it. That wand was going to have no objections to the state of Tom's soul. It would never have let him down if it could help it. We don't know how well Lucius Malfoy's wand actually cooperated with

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Tom, just that he was able to AK Charity Burbage with it. And even if it was balking, Tom would have only interpreted that as its being an inferior wand. But the Elder Wand's reputation alone would have made its lack of compliance more apparent. And evidently did.

And if the Elder Wand refused to obey him, the place to look isn't the wand, but at Tom himself. What is most likely to be different about Tom from all the other wizards through whose hands it has passed over the centuries? Eh?

As I say, the Elder Wand clearly has no objection to killing, and as such has no apparent objection to damaged souls, but why not give us a hint that it may have an objection to incomplete ones? Even if only once we got to the celestial King's Cross. Which would have made a certain amount of sense, it isn't information that would be widely known out in the world, nor would Harry have had any reasonable source for finding it out. Even the wandmakers probably wouldn't have known about that peculiarity.

Just one little shift, and we'd be rid of the necessity for just about all of the stupidity that Rowling lumbered us with to do with wands in Book 7. Harry wouldn't be the master of the Elder Wand because he yanked Draco's hawthorn wand out of his hand a few weeks earlier. He would be the Master of the Elder Wand because when offered the choice of killing one of the two of them earlier that evening, the wand chose to kill Tom. Harry's Expelliarmus the following morning gave it the excuse it needed to go back and finish the job.

I mean why, *why*, if Tom Riddle's personal choices were so bloody bad, can't they be rolled into constituting the very



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reason why he ended up defeating himself? Not because of the choices that he *didn't* make — because he was incapable of those — but because of the choices that he *actually made*?

If that premise is added to the mix — and, yes, I know Rowling didn't, she doesn't seem to have a lot of appreciation for mechanics of any sort — it just *about* serves the purpose. The Wand didn't like Riddle from the get-go and was being as uncooperative toward him as the blackthorn wand had been to Harry or Bellatrix's wand was for Hermione. (Which probably ought to not have been quite so exaggerated in their resistance to their present holders, but a comment in passing that they just didn't work as well as their own wands would have been perfectly reasonable.) When the Elder Wand was offered the choice of killing Harry, or a fragment of its current holder's soul, it took the fragment, and dragged Tom into the waiting station at the same time it knocked Harry into it.

If the Elder Wand is unique — really *unique* — you have some chance of pulling that off. And the elements for the proper *sort* of uniqueness are all right *there*. The wand is set up as having always been more powerful than any other wand out there. It is centuries old at the very least. It has been through a lot of hands and has connected with a lot of wizard's souls. *If* any wand was ever going to develop a degree of self-consciousness and independent agency, or some power of active “choice” of its own, it is that wand. Particularly if wands supposedly *have* the power of choice.

Which Ollivander has been harping on since the beginning of the series.

Tom is even fully aware of and complains about its active

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lack of cooperation — which is the only reason why he would have disposed of as useful a tool as Snape. All that is needed is one good reason to explain why the wand is refusing to work with Tom. A reason that's directly related to *Tom*.

And we've got one! And she *didn't use it*!



Actually what she gave us hinges far too much upon the (suddenly introduced, i.e., Ta-Dah!) premise that all wands recognize each other, and the totally unanticipated happenstance of Harry facing Tom with what was originally Draco's wand. And I flatly don't believe it. That's not just balognium. It's bullshit.

The two spells do seem to have gone off together, as they did the last time Harry and Tom came face-to-face in the graveyard. Had the wands shared a core we would have got another Priori Incantatum arm wrestling match. Had the spells behaved normally, the AK would have simply run roughshod over the Expelliarmus and nailed Harry unless he was able to dodge out of the way. That normal wands supposedly recognize one another strikes me as pure balognium, but the Elder Wand might be able to. Or at least it might resonate to something in the source of the magic which is generating the Expelliarmus that it is plowing through with its AK. (Which it is also resisting delivering, since it is not going to cooperate with its holder any more than it can avoid.)

I really do think that postulating that the Elder Wand is semi-sentient — which in itself is a stretch — plays far better than to postulate that *all* wands are semi-sentient. And that if the Elder Wand has been without a true Master, then it is



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probably shopping. That AK in the forest clearing underlined the connection between Tom and Harry, and the Wand is now aware of both of them.

And it made its choice.

Possibly just to get away from Tom.



I really am inclined to think that Albus's original plan probably was for Snape to get the wand, to hang onto it, and to make a point of meeting Harry before the final confrontation in order to pass him that final message, and for Harry, whose first line of defense is pretty much always *Expelliarmus*, to disarm him of it. Giving Harry technical possession of all three of the Hallows. But if that was the case, Albus completely botched the handling of the matter by sitting on the information and not telling his puppets what they were expected to do.

Whether Harry had the true Mastery or not, whether he left the Wand in Snape's custody or not. It would at least have kept the Elder Wand out of Tom's hands. I'm not sure where the reasoning was supposed to go from there, and frankly I suspect Rowling doesn't either. But it would have required that Snape *know* that Albus intended for him to take charge of his wand — which he absolutely *didn't* — and for Harry to know that the wand Snape was using had been Albus's wand, and that Albus's wand really was the fabled Elder Wand. And we never got anything that would have reasonably led him, or us, to that conclusion.

What I think the big mistake was, is that when she decided to convince the reader that despite the fact that wands and their

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wizards are supposed to be intimately connected, wands are also, at the same time, effectively little wooden bimbos who will happily go off with any bully who can take them away from their former "protector," and are *always* shopping for a better one. (In which case you really have to wonder about Neville's Gran, forcing the kid to use a "legacy wand" that he hadn't won.) I am not altogether convinced that Rowling had really thought any of this through.

The underlying problem here is that it's completely out of scale. Either wands are faithless wooden bimbos, consciously looking for an excuse to abandon their masters for a more "powerful" one, or they aren't. If they are just sticks of wood with a magical core which responds well to one person or another due to the kind of magical harmonics that I have postulated in the essay on wandmaking, and which comparability is inherent between the wand and the person using it, there isn't so much of a problem. If using a wand is like wearing reading glasses from the drugstore, one pair of glasses will probably help any number of people bring the fine print into focus. Another pair will work better for a different lot of people. You don't have to postulate exaggerated issues of wand "mastery" as a major justification for all of them.

I suspect that you can pass a wand on by physically handing it to whomever you want to give it to. Ron had no stated trouble with Charlie's old wand in his first year, despite the fact that it was already in really poor condition when he got it. Under Rowling's rules, Harry physically took Malfoy's wand from Malfoy's hand, there was no magic involved in that exchange, but the wand settled down and cooperated with him quite



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smoothly. It had evidently felt itself be passed from one legitimate master's hand to the next. Which makes no sense whatsoever, and was only introduced to try to pull off a cheap trick at the climax of the book.

If we recalibrate the premise so that the Elder Wand is the special one, and normal wands really do act upon subtle laws — which upon the whole are too subtle to present much of a problem to most people under most circumstances — the whole issue of the true mastery of ordinary wands just goes away and becomes a non-issue. As it probably ought to be.

But the thing that fouls us up here, and is the detail which really renders the whole premise into balognium is that now suddenly we are supposed to understand that wands not only choose their wizards, they seem to recognize other *wands*. And I *really* don't think that premise is a part of the *solution*.

This is a case where Rowling having access to a beta would have probably been helpful.

What Rowling may not have intended, or has inadvertently obscured the significance of, is the fact that she had originally made such an investment out of making so much of the fact that Harry and Tom's original wands were inherently *brothers*, which would very reasonably have been "aware" of one another. Now such a fluke simply does not really seem to matter all that much, since *all* wands seem to know each other and to have a private pecking order in which any relationship between them scarcely counts.

Because the way it reads now, and as Harry "explains" it (and since when is *Harry* an expert at wandlore?) in the final confrontation, what mattered is that the Elder wand came up

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against the same wand which had disarmed it from a previous owner, a year earlier, and it *recognized* it.

Or, in other words, it wasn't that the Elder Wand recognized *Harry*, it recognized the hawthorn wand. Not the wand's *holder*, the wand *itself*.

Which does not fit anything that we had *ever* been told to that point. And given that this is supposedly the punchline to the whole conflict, we really *ought* to have.

Which compounds the problem by expecting us to now believe that no wand that has ever lost a duel against another wand will ever again act against *any* holder of that wand. And that just makes no sense whatsoever.

And the final wrap up of the climax of your story is not the place that one ought to be introducing some kind of new and hoopy magic. This is pulling a rabbit out of your hat. It's flashy all right. But the audience knows that it is rigged, and it's totally bogus.

It's balognium. Unquestionably. And it didn't *need* to be.



Which, so long as we are on the subject, brings up the question of Harry Potter and his Amazing Auto-Wand.

Just what the hell was *that* about?

Actually, I think I am going to come back to the issue of the Amazing Auto-Wand later, since it is rather closely connected to a couple of the other bits of balognium — or near-balognium — that we are also having to field. And it would make sense to take a closer look at them first.





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These are, of course, the Deathly Hallows themselves.

I really do not believe that the Deathly Hallows as a package deal of three significant artifacts was a part of the original plan.

Frankly, I do not think the Deathly Hallows even existed before some time in 2006. They were a retrofit, not an original intention.

I'm sure that Rowling always did intend to wrap the conclusion of the series around the Elder Wand business, although she seems to have thoroughly botched it. The significance of the Resurrection Stone is a whole lot less certain. It's not impossible that she's had the idea of the Resurrection Stone as an element in the build to the climax for some time. She did introduce the Peverills and their ring in HBP after all. And I think another chat with Lily and James before the ending was probably always on the table.

But there was no guarantee that she ever intended to introduce anything like the Resurrection Stone in order to make it so.

But it doesn't look as if there was a reasonable point to introduce the concept of the Hallows any earlier than she did, unless she had introduced the *whole story* of the three brothers earlier than she did. Which, in all fairness she really *should* have done.

Otoh, she may or may not have just added it wholesale at the next to last minute. I do have to admit that the Priori Incantatum "echoes" in GoF made a nice bit of foreshadowing. That could indicate that she did have such a reappearance planned — or something *like* it planned — at least by that point in the series. But we don't know whether she had always intended to use the same method to invoke them that she finally did. Well-designed mechanics are not her strong point.

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Before she got the idea to introduce the Hallows however, the Peverill ring may just have been an ugly ring with an *actual* coat of arms engraved on it, as was stated by Marvolo Gaunt, and which merely turned out to have been one of Riddle's first Horcruxes. Although even the HBP reference to something engraved on it could have been a retrofit, *if* the idea for the Resurrection Stone came up somewhere in the middle of writing HBP — which is not impossible, although I tend to doubt it. Marvolo Gaunt was depicted as an ignorant old sod and might have referred to *any* sigil as a coat-of-arms.

And the Resurrection Stone itself really isn't balognium, at all. That particular element functions quite properly for what is required of it.

It doesn't explain why Albus would have lost his head and put it on, since you don't even call back the dead by *wearing* it. To call back the dead you have to take it *off* and turn it three times in your palm. But forcing Albus to act like an idiot does not render the artifact, as it is set up, into balognium.



But I really don't think she ever got the idea of rolling them in with the Cloak as a package deal of 3 for 1 until about the time she threw out the question of why Albus had borrowed James's cloak. And that wasn't until the summer of 2006.

And for that matter, it was a question that she never bothered to answer. Why *did* Albus borrow James's cloak? We don't know. We never heard of him ever *doing* anything with it.

Because if the Cloak is a "Hallow," it *also* needs to be unique. The Hallows are *all* unique. They have special powers, or vastly



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enhanced powers. But for the first 6 books of the series, Harry's Cloak is simply an invisibility cloak. It's never presented as being particularly "special."

Well, *yeah*, it's an invisibility cloak, and that's pretty cool. But it isn't the *only* invisibility cloak running around the Potterverse. And there has never been any quality peculiar to *Harry's* cloak that was ever pointed out to us to set it apart from what is generally expected of invisibility cloaks.

And there needed to be. If, over the course of some 3300 pages Rowling could not give us even one hint that there was something unusual about Harry's cloak, then I think her claim that it is the third of the Deathly Hallows is just something that she bunged in at the last moment to spin the Hallows into a traditional set of three artifacts, rather than just a super Wand and a mysterious Stone.

Because she had already demonstrated that all that cloak did was hide you from most peoples' sight. Not even everyone's sight either. Albus was aware of Harry and Ron hidden under it all the way back in either PS/SS or CoS. "Moody" could see Harry through it. Even *Peeves* knew when Harry was there. Rowling has backpedaled in an interview by trying to claim that Albus couldn't *actually* see them, he was aware of them because he had (nonverbally) cast a *Hominum Revelio*. It's clumsy, and since he was just visiting Hagrid in his hut there is no reason *why* he should suddenly feel a need to cast a nonverbal *Hominum Revelio*, but that might account for it, if I believed it. But I'm no longer willing to give Rowling even that much of a pass. She's lied to us too often for that.

Impostor! Moody could *definitely* see through it in GoF. I'm

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sure that real Moody could have too. And *Peeves* was instantly aware of Harry, under the cloak, as soon as Harry stepped into a hallway that *Peeves* was setting up some of his mischief in. That was all the way back in PS/SS. Does Rowling honestly believe that nobody remembers what they read?

Albus also was quick at the beginning to PoA to caution him that an invisibility cloak would *not* hide one from Dementors, either. Which was confirmed during the trio's raid on the Ministry in DHs and which makes the claim that it would have ever hidden anyone from Death a bit problematic.

We can not even be convinced that it would hide you from the dead. Harry's "honor guard" through the forest, composed of his beloved dead, seem to have had no difficulty keeping pace with him, although he was under his cloak all during that march to his execution.

We even saw in HBP that the cloak won't protect you from magic, either. Malfoy managed to hex Harry right through that cloak on the Hogwarts Express with a lucky shot.

So what is the *point*?

The Cloak needs to have some quality that is not standard equipment for invisibility cloaks. Even if it never really came up in the course of the story — and it really *ought* to have come up. Otherwise why should it be classified as a Hallow at all? (Apart from authorial fiat.)

Rowling wasn't able to come with a single reasonable justification in the story for why she was suddenly making a big song-and-dance about Harry's cloak. The only thing unusual about Harry's cloak is that it doesn't rip, tear, stain, or wear out. It really appears to simply be there to make up the numbers. That



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alone does not qualify it as a Hallow.

It does not really qualify as balognium, either. Nothing of import seems to have depended on it. It's just a recycled element that she loaded up with a lot of bogus "significance." Which is only annoying.



But even though it isn't actually balognium, it still could have *mattered*. Even though Rowling had already disqualified it from having any super-special qualities of secrecy or magical protection over the course of the previous 6 books. She just didn't put any kind of thought or effort into giving it a *reason* to matter.

It could have.

In a way that might relate to some of our other problems elsewhere, too.

So let's just see if kicking this particular can around the block turns up any possibilities.

The LiveJournalist Swythyv and I were kicking around a number of Hallows and Peverill theories before I uploaded this. Particularly regarding the Cloak.

We've got that minor difference of where it purportedly came from in the story, for one thing. All three artifacts supposedly came from Death, but while he created the Wand and the Stone expressly for the two older brothers, as custom jobs, the Cloak had been his own, Ergo: the third brother effectively *captured* it, it was not custom built for an enemy (with a booby trap built into it).

Actually if you pay a bit closer attention to what the *story* of the three brothers actually says, to "master" Death is really just

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to master the *fear* of Death. The goal is to meet him without fear. Because you are going to eventually meet him, regardless.

In the middle of all this back-and-forthing, a couple of details suddenly pinged for me. They are probably crack, but it might be worth a digression to poke at them for a bit.

The Cloak won't hide you from Dementors, who are blind, and evidently track your presence by some means other than normal sight. It also won't hide you from Peeves, who is a spirit, even if not a true ghost. We don't know if it will hide you from conventional ghosts, since no ghost has ever acknowledged Harry when he was under it. But then that might have just been due to good manners. (Which Peeves totally lacks.)

Ghosts are the imprints of departed souls. Dementors hunt and eat souls. The Cloak does not, evidently, conceal the presence of a soul. It does, however, conceal bodies. Unless you have a magical eye to see through it.

We do not know whether it conceals minds.

What if it was keeping the Cloak somewhere about him at all times over the course of year 6, as per Albus's recommendation, is what was *really* keeping Voldemort from seeing into Harry's mind? What if the Cloak protects you from Legilimency. Which gives one access to minds, not necessarily souls.

It obviously doesn't protect you from the direct, eye-contact sort of Legilimency that Snape used after the Sectumsempera incident if you are not *wearing* it, but having it on you may keep you safe from the kind of remote hacking that Tom had been doing all the year before.

Harry continued to keep the Cloak about him all through DHs as well. And any mind connection which took place that



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year appears to have gone in the other direction. \*Without\* Tom having any awareness of it, too.

It isn't a true Occlumency shield, however. Some time ago I postulated that Occlumency on a high enough level might enable you to be able to resist Dementors. I still believe that that is probably not unrelated to the fact that some 10 or so of Voldemort's higher-ranking followers managed to survive for more than a decade in Azkaban without losing the will to live. The Cloak would not have concealed Harry from a Dementor, and if he were simply holding it it wouldn't protect him from a direct legilimency attack either.

Tom was probably actively using Occlumency against the mind connection for at least the month or so after the Battle of the Atrium, before Harry started carrying the Cloak around on Albus's advice. But Tom clearly is not still doing that by Year 7. In fact he seems even more unaware of the connection in Book 7 than Harry was through most of Book 5.

Yet Harry never got a peep from him all through Year 6. If the Cloak kept Harry's consciousness from registering against Tom's Occlumency shield at all, then eventually Tom may have dropped it.

Like I say, it's probably crack. Of course by admitting this possibility, we'd lose the interpretation from John Granger's Scar-o-Vision theory that the Harry tantrum over Trelawney's bombshell that Snape had been the eavesdropper who reported the Prophecy to Tom, might have alerted Tom and let him eavesdrop on the discussion in Albus's office before Harry and Albus left for the Cave. We would also lose any likelihood of his having had a ringside seat of Albus's murder. But we already

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needed to dismiss the idea that he had witnessed the murder in any case, since Tom didn't know about Draco disarming Albus. And Scar-o-Vision had never been confirmed, either.



Which brings us back to Harry and his Amazing Auto-Wand.

King'sCross! Albus put on his omniscience hat while denying all the while that he actually knew anything, and gave Harry a spiel that back when Harry won the Priori Incantatum tug-of-war, he had won the additional prize of having some of Voldemort's power trapped in his wand, now conveniently polarized against its original owner. (Even though the tug-of-war consisted of Harry pushing the little magical beads on the beam of light that connected the wands *into* Tom's wand rather than the other way around. You would think that if one wand held anything belonging to the other it would have been Tom's wand.)

Well, if that even worked, that might explain why the wand was able to so easily smash the wand that Tom, had borrowed from Lucius Malfoy. But it doesn't explain why it went into auto-mode and attacked Tom on its own in the first place. And Rowling went out of her way to insist at several points in the story that the wand had attacked Voldemort by itself.

In fact this insistence raises far more questions than it answers (and it doesn't answer *any* of them).

If the wand was *always* capable of going into auto-mode, that might explain the all but unconscious Protego shield that Harry cast during the penultimate Occlumency lesson with Snape. But if the wand was only specifically polarized against Tom, why would it jump into action against Snape?



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For that matter what was the *point* of having the wand fighting Voldemort *on its own*? If all that was necessary was that the wand smash the wand that Voldemort was using, thereby opening up the mind link between Harry and Tom in the other direction. Because that is what that incident actually *did*.

Although why it did so by smashing Lucius Malfoy's wand instead of the yew that supposedly provided that extra "power" in the first place also wand needs a bit of explanation, which doesn't appear to be forthcoming, either.

But to have it do so on its *own*? That wasn't necessary. Nor was it EVER properly explained. All that does is add confusion, and make the protagonist look useless. Was it really necessary to establish at this point of the novel that the protagonist of this story is dumber and less effective than a stick of wood?

Why couldn't Harry have reacted as he reacted before, when it was Snape in the Occlumency lesson? Remain conscious at least, know that he flung out his hand and threw *something* at his opponent without thinking clearly, or not knowing precisely what it was he threw until someone else identified it? Or didn't identify it, as the case may be.

That would have passed as yet another unconscious prompt, of which we have had no shortage over the course of this series. It still wouldn't have explained everything, but it would support the view that Harry at least does have excellent reflexes, and it would fit in with a group of other things that remain unexplained, rather than throwing a new and even gaudier distraction at us.



## Holy Baloney!

When we had the face-off in the graveyard. Harry won the arm wrestling match between their wands. KC!Albus claims that since Harry won, his wand took on some of his opponent's power.

Well, okay. Then by the end of GoF Harry and Tom are tethered through Tom's soul, Harry's blood and their wand cores. The soul link and the wand core are allegedly Tom->Harry. The blood link is Harry->Tom.

Is it any wonder that Tom spent all of Year 5 slipping in and out of Harry's head and setting off episodes of CAPSLOCKS? How could he have kept away? Eventually he got the bright idea to make use of the connection to send a false message. It worked, too. Lured the kid right into the DoM.

This is in contrast to Year 1 where Harry was having scar headaches and QuirrellMort was completely oblivious, and also to GoF where Harry was getting occasional remote visions with, so far as we can tell, no awareness on Tom's end of the connection whatsoever.

Fast-forward to Year 7 and the escape from the Dursleys'.

Harry is still a minor, he is still tethered three ways to Tom. But this time Tom isn't using his own wand.

And then, in the absence of the brother wand with the matching core, Harry's wand goes on Autopilot. (I really think that it would have played better if Harry had been conscious of drawing his wand and throwing magic it at Tom, but just not be sure of what it was he did. It could have been passed off as something like blowing up Aunt Marge that way, and come back to bite us all later.) Harry's wand spits back the power it has been storing since the end of Year 4 and shatters the wand that Tom is using. This evidently also severs one of the Tom->Harry links





## Holy Baloney!

and replaces it with a Harry->Tom link. Voldemort appears to have never got inside Harry's head after that point.

And the Harry->Tom link was fully active by that same evening.

With much, much clearer reception than ever before.

This is where the possible combination of factors comes in. The cloak protects Harry from long distance Legilimency attacks from Tom. But the whole point of an invisibility cloak is that you can see out. Harry kept the cloak with him through DHs, so Tom wasn't aware of him through the mental connection, but Harry was now seeing into Tom's mind, past the cloak.

Like I say. It's probably crack, but it seems worth at least considering.

Even if Rowling didn't.

And we still have no good explanation for why Harry's wand was suddenly bolder and more competent than he is.



## Loose Canon

Well, okay. I still haven't been able to work myself up to doing a *full* reread of DHs.

I *did* try. But I couldn't make it to the end before I finally bailed. I'll pick it up and turn to the end to look something up, but I truly am not ready to read that book again yet.

Or possibly ever.



**S**ome time ago the bulk of the first iteration of this essay was moved over into the 'Post-Mortem' essay in which I try, as much as possible, to confine myself to examining the writing as writing. *This* particular essay is the one in which I attempt to examine the writing as *story*.

There are just far too many places where the story simply does not hold together.

Not that this is confined to DHs. We already had all kinds of bits of story which didn't add up well before Rowling even told us what the final book in the series was going to be called.

Quite a few of the ones here get raked over in some of the other essays in the collection as well. But I think they need a bit closer examination here. Including a couple of Rowling's unkept promises.

Such as: from an early interview there was a statement made that we should expect to discover that Harry's parents' line of work was "important." We did indeed expect to do so. We did not, however, ever discover any such thing.

Once HBP came out, I was already beginning to doubt that we would discover anything of the sort. Although I was still inclined to hedge my bets. It's obvious that a number of bits of





## Loose Canon

information had been deliberately kept back for the last book. And that could have turned out to be one of them. Certainly in regards to Lily. We'd been tacitly promised another bombshell there. Mainly by the narrative having concentrated so exclusively upon James, until Horace Slughorn turned up and rhapsodized about Lily's skill in Potions for an entire book.

In the event though, we never heard a peep as to the Potters having ever done anything that was of any importance whatsoever. Apart from having a baby, and dying.

In fact, over the course of the last couple of books, the Potters (both of them) have been reduced to a pair of snotty, stuck-up, useless young berks. Rowling has since bounced a rather silly plot bunny at us concerning alleged activities of James and Sirius outside of Hogwarts. Which I refuse to adopt, and which was never mentioned in the books, nor does it add up to anything we had been told there. The most that can be said is that it does not absolutely contradict anything obvious.

Ultimately "What the Potters did" is simply not in the series at all.

I had considered it possible that while Rowling still had her main plot outline, this issue was something out on a secondary thread that had been snipped, like the Weasley cousin. We might have still discovered what James, or Lily did for a living (it now appears that Petunia was absolutely right, and they were both unemployed). But I doubted that this information would turn out to be anything that would be required for solving the problems which we knew had been set for the last installment of the adventure.

Second: we have myriad timeline glitches. Such as Albus's perishing "11 years." Dumbledore makes this statement toward

## Loose Canon

the end of the first chapter of PS/SS in response to Minerva's fussing over the excessive jubilation attendant upon the fall of the Dark Lord. He points out that "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years." He goes on to underline the matter by stating on the following page that for eleven years he has been trying to persuade people to call He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named by his proper name; Voldemort.

Never mind that his proper name is "Tom Riddle," a fact that Albus is perfectly well aware of. Indeed, a fact which we don't discover until the end of Book 2. In retrospect this ought really to have served as a warning that the author has little concern for the veracity of the information she would feed us, both on or off the page.

Timelines, however are a mess of a whole different magnitude, and one that I'm not going to go into here. But the fact that they are such a completely useless bundle of contradictions is a damning indictment against an author who attempts to pretend that this is creating a viable backstory.

Particularly not for a story in which two thirds of the motivations are all anchored at least a generation earlier. If not more.

The fact is that Rowling has made a habit of sketching in matters related to both her foreground *and* her background with a lot of vague sweeping pronouncements, and leaving it to the reader to draw all of the connections.

Which is tantamount to expecting the reader to shoulder the job of actually writing the book. And then, as it turned out, taking pot-shots at his efforts.





## Loose Canon

A great deal more damning is the fact that by the time she made it to the end, she was not merely telling the reader what to think, but had managed to undermine her entire set-up of why Harry Potter ever had to live with the Dursleys at all.

The gibberish about Harry's mastery of the Elder wand is bad enough, and has its own article in this collection ('The Power He "Knows Not"'). Her "explanation" for that one serves as a grand demonstration of straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

But Albus Dumbledore "Explaining It All" in the Celestial King's Cross station outdoes that in a walk. It manages to completely disembowel her whole premise of the Magical Maternal Sacrificial Magic™ which presumably has kept Harry alive since Voldemort originally attacked him, and \*required\* that he live with the Dursleys in order to maintain it.

This premise dates all the way back to the beginning of the series and had been a continuing motif. But now, the whole line of reasoning is revealed to have been every bit as bogus as a wide selection of the fandom has always called it. Rendering the whole "Harry must live with the Dursleys to be protected from Voldemort" into a completely artificial source of conflict, and Albus's insistence that he do so starts looking like something other than merely insensitive.

This goes beyond merely rendering it into balogneum. This is a poison pill.

Back at the opening of HBP, Rowling made a great to-do about how this sacrificial protection would eventually end when Harry came of age. Indeed, Dumbledore made a point of extracting an agreement from the Dursleys to continue to give

## Loose Canon

him house room until he turned 17.

She continued to beat this particular drum at the opening of DHs with the Order making elaborate plans to move Harry to some other protected area before the sacrificial magic ran out. Which resulted in the 7 Potters escape from Privet Drive debacle.

Presumably, by the time of his birthday party at the Weasleys' this particular magical protection was no longer a part of his arsenal.

Well, no, not so much. Not according to Albus in the Celestial King's Cross Station. If I may quote:

*"He took your blood, believing it would strengthen him. He took into his body a tiny part of the enchantments your mother laid upon you when she died for you. His body keeps her sacrifice alive, and while that enchantment survives, so do you and so does Voldemort's last hope for himself."*

So, effectively, the "blood sacrifice" which allegedly protected Harry has actually been ineffective against Voldemort since the end of GoF, if it ever existed at all?

And yet it's still protecting Harry *because* Voldemort appropriated a piece of it and is harboring it himself?

And furthermore, while Harry is now of age and no longer can draw upon magical mystical maternal sacrificial booga-booga himself, it is still in effect because a little bit of it is being stored remotely by Voldemort? Presumably only because Voldemort took that blood sample *before* Harry came of age?

Voldemort is certainly not underage. Lily wasn't *his* mother. Why would it apply to him at all?

Does that work anything like a Horcrux? Or, more to the point, a Harrycrux?



## Loose Canon

It rather sounds like it.

And Rowling seriously expects me to *believe* this?

It would have been far simpler, and far less damaging to the entire canon, for Albus to have simply told Harry that he was still alive because you cannot kill two separate entities with one AK.

And that much I will *continue* to maintain.

And clearly I am not wrong.

Trying to hang everything that ever happens (or doesn't happen) in the series on a mystical maternal sacrificial protection which is apparently without any constraints or limits, renders it into an all-purpose excuse which exceeds any allowable balognium limit that the reader should ever be expected to swallow.



Even with all of the screwiness and contradictions which we got in HBP, once Rowling left us alone with it for a couple of years, to look at it from different angles, and to chew on it, and to digest it a bit, many of us managed to sort what we had out into various configurations that just about made sense.

But then she dropped DHs on us. From a great height. And our list of things to quibble over expanded exponentially.

And, more than a decade further down the track, DHs is still all but completely indigestible. There is next to no nutritional value there.

I think that if Rowling had deliberately sat down and asked herself; "Now. How many of my previously-stated 'rules' can I break in the course of this one book, just to wind people up?" she could have hardly bettered her performance.

## Loose Canon

I'm not going to go into the characters, who suddenly started acting either like aliens to themselves, or like cartoons. Or to fret unduly about why the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy of 1692 is suddenly moved back to 1689. But it rapidly becomes evident that there is something seriously off about the caliber of the underlying reasoning deployed to deliver the story. And all sorts of things that have suddenly been sprung upon us seem to have been abruptly sprung upon us to no purpose.



For example: why the hell didn't we know who Charity Burbage even was? Hermione sat in her class all through Year 3. Rowling couldn't *once* have dropped the name; "Professor Burbage" in passing, so we might have at least remembered it, and the woman wouldn't have come across as a *complete* redshirt?

This is the kind of thing that convinces me that Rowling doesn't have a scrap of respect for her characters and doesn't give a damn about any of them. They're all just little Imperiused puppets to her.

And then there is all the skewed logic that doesn't even seem to try to hold together.

Example: that whole "exciting" decoy flight from #4 Privet drive was supposedly forced upon us because with the suspected infiltration of the Ministry, if Potter had used the Floo network or Apparated, the Ministry (and the infiltrating DEs) would "have him." We are directly informed of this.

In Chapter 11, however, we are told — just as directly — that it is impossible to track someone who has Apparated unless you grab hold of them as they do it without their knowing. Or



## Loose Canon

in other words you can only track a Disapparating wizard by latching on and following him, side-along. (And taking a major risk of splinching since he isn't preparing to Apparate *you*.)

This was transparently inserted to set us up for the fact that eventually one of the DEs would do exactly that and force the trio out of their hideaway at #12.

Only, now it raises the question of why Harry couldn't have Apparated side-along to the Weasleys' with an Order member from some other location than Privet Drive. Mrs Figg's house perhaps. No one could have grabbed hold of them to track them there. Not unless there was a DE in an invisibility cloak hiding in her sitting room. Or one of them is a cat Animagus.

And besides. It's *portkeys* that the Ministry authorizes. And it monitors the Floo. The Ministry issues Apparition *licenses*, but it doesn't oversee Apparition.

Although when you consider; Magical reversal squads supposedly are alerted in the case of splinching. Or are they? Why didn't a magical reversal squad respond to *Ron's* splinching?

Or, hell, if they are tracking Apparitions, why haven't significantly large groups of people all Apparating to the same place been monitored to lead the DMLE to the site of DE meetings?

For that matter why couldn't Harry have simply left with the Dursleys, when the Dursleys did, and gone with them to a neutral point somewhere well away from #4, been dropped off, and then side-alonged with someone else? If it was safe for them why wouldn't it be safe for him? I seriously doubt that anyone sitting in a Ministry office could be able to tell who is being side-alonged when someone else is Apparating. Even if there is a master log of Apparitions.



## Loose Canon

And if there is, why didn't anyone ever compare it with the dates of the DE's known activities in the past? Presumably, if there is such a log, the log records who is doing the Apparating *by name*? At least from departure point. Which might be helpful if said departure point is a *crime scene*. And if it records destination, why didn't someone send Aurors to the identified site to arrest them?

It's all a piece of fake tension produced by fake reasoning.



At most, the Ministry (which hadn't fallen yet) only was having #4 itself remotely monitored. Harry could have gotten away from there easily enough. That whole trip wasn't necessary. It was as illogical and contrived and poorly planned as something I would expect from a fanficer who was still in Middle School. And a lot of fanficers in Middle School could have come up with something a good deal more convincing.

It was a big flashy production number, "written for the movies," and inserted to try to make the reader think the story was *exciting*.

While we're at it, why not send Hedwig off the day before, with an innocuous letter to the Weasleys to ask them to keep Hedwig until further notice? Get the bird out of the house with a message that would give nothing significant away, one that even if it was intercepted, the DEs would just read and let the bird continue on its way in hopes of intercepting future messages, and eliminate the silliness of half a dozen people escaping from #4 with stuffed birds in cages.

(Answer: since Rowling had nothing for the bird to do in





## Loose Canon

this story, she had to either kill her on stage, or make other arrangements. She decided could manage some additional cheap tear-jerking by killing her. Why couldn't Hedwig have earned her keep at the Weasleys'? I doubt that poor old Errol is still around. For that matter, why couldn't Ginny take Hedwig with her to Hogwarts?)

And so long as we still are escaping from Privet Drive: we were told years ago in 'Quidditch Through the Ages' that there is no spell or charm which will enable a wizard to fly unassisted. And yet during the escape, we see Tom Riddle swooping around like Superman. What's up with that?

No. I'm sorry. I just don't believe it.

To say nothing of Harry Potter and His Amazing Auto-Wand, which more properly belongs in the second of the balognium essays.

(Or the grazing Thestral. We know Thestrals like fresh meat, but they also were foraging in rubbish bins in London. They probably eat anything. A pity that Hagrid, who used them for a lesson, didn't bother to *tell* us so. Still, a creature with fangs is not really likely to *graze*.)



We are also expected to believe that the Harry who mended Demelza Roberts's split lip from a collision in Quidditch practice without problems in HBP suddenly doesn't know how to heal wounds by Chapter 2 in DHs.

Or (all together now) the brilliant Hermione Granger who can rewrite her own parents personal histories and pack them off to Australia by chapter 6, yet claims she doesn't know any

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memory spells a handful of chapters later. This is one of the reasons I am convinced the book wasn't actually edited at all. This would have been an easy fix. She could have truthfully claimed that she didn't know *Obliviate*. You don't create a whole new history for someone with an *Obliviate*.



Plus, we *finally* had the "Dark wizard Grindelwald" brought up in (well, it's Skeeter, so you can't exactly call it polite) conversation. We have now officially even been informed of Albus Dumbledore's "spectacular" duel with Gellert Grindelwald. It's about time.

Only; excuse me? A supposed "war" with the Dark wizard who has allegedly conquered most of Eastern Europe is settled in a single, two wizard, one-on-one duel?

You know, I would have thought that he'd have had, oh, something like an *army* to *support* him in this so-called war. Am I being unreasonable here?

Is that how wizarding wars are traditionally fought? The two sides each pick a champion and they just duke it out between the two of them? And everyone just agrees to accept the outcome? Nobody on the losing side goes on fighting?

Or had Grindelwald's bid for world dominance already failed, and it was just that nobody could capture him or convince him to turn himself in?

For five years?

That's how long people had been begging one of the local High School teachers in Great Britain to come and solve their foreign wars problem for them. Single-handedly, evidently.



## Loose Canon

(What is wrong with this picture?)

I mean, extrapolate that into people nagging McGonagall (whose time at school certainly overlapped Riddle's before Rowling pulled another; "Ha, ha, fooled you!" and suddenly jettisoned her statement that McGonagall was "a sprightly 70" at the end of GoF, and, out of left field, rewrote Minerva's history to post on Pottermore retrofitting her a couple of decades younger) to solve their Tom Riddle problem and see how well it plays. The whole concept is just so wrong on so many levels it makes my brain itch.



I will have to admit that Rowling did manage to surprise me once in DHs. It was in Chapter 2. And it was a straightforward "Fool me twice, shame on me" moment, too. It was about the last time that anything in the book really surprised me, though.

But I did get suckered into the belief that after Harry had been triumphantly proved to be telling the truth about Voldemort's return over the course of OotP, that the Ministry would believe him at the end of HBP. The PROPHET article with its insinuations that Harry had been seen running from the scene from which Dumbledore had fallen from the tower (*before* the fall of the Ministry, mind you) yanked the rug right out from under me. Rowling could still do that when she keeps things more or less in scale.

Of course it does raise the question of why no one ever openly accused Harry of murdering Cedric Diggory over the course of OotP. Which, if Voldemort had supposedly not returned — as the Ministry was claiming — is certainly the first alternative

## Loose Canon

explanation one might have expected people to leap to.

Particularly given that the DADA professor at that point had been teaching all of the Hogwarts students from Year 4 and up about \*Unforgivables\* all year. And it would certainly have been an easy way to get Harry out of the picture if the Ministry chose to do it. Just bung him into Azkaban for murdering a fellow student and Bob's your uncle...

Of course that would have brought the whole series to a screeching halt.



And next, in Chapter 6, Rowling subjects us to a shabby little attempt to rewrite HBP.

*"Dumbledore was sure Riddle already knew how to make a Horcrux by the time he asked Slughorn about them."* Er, no Harry, Albus didn't tell us — or you — anything of the sort. Or at least not at any point in any conversation to which we were a party. He wasn't thinking that at the time Tom was asking about it either, although he may have come to that conclusion later. And we certainly never heard him tell you about it.

For that matter, Tom probably *had* already come across the book on creating a Horcrux before his conversation with Slughorn. But he didn't come across it in the Hogwarts library.

Rowling clearly either doesn't remember, or she wants us to forget that she already had Sluggy tell Tom that the subject of Horcruxes was banned by the time Tom was asking him about them, and to not mention their conversation to anyone, accordingly. I know what I've read. And I can pick up my copy of HBP and read it again any time I please, because the con-



## Loose Canon

versation *really is in there*. And what Slughorn says is that Tom won't find any references to Horcruxes in the Hogwarts library because the subject has been banned.

If Slughorn was being truthful in his statement that the subject had been banned, and that Tom would not find any further references to it in the Hogwarts library — and it is difficult to believe that Slughorn would be arbitrarily lying about something that could be so easily proved false — then the whole conversation in DHs of how Tom had managed to get hold of the forbidden book before Albus removed it from the library is completely out of left field. And fake, besides.

If the subject of Horcruxes had already been banned by the time Tom was asking about it — which was well before Albus became Headmaster, and Albus really had the authority to remove it from the library himself, then either Albus had ramrodded the issue through despite any protests from Dippet (although why anyone would have raised objections to banning that subject is also debatable, surely it would only really be of use to someone who was trying to destroy one, and you don't leave that job to schoolchildren — or *do you?* Albus?), or the whole staff had agreed to the suppression of that subject.

In any event, unless Sluggy is lying, the book *had* already been removed from the library. Given what we now know about Albus, I certainly wouldn't have put it beyond him to have removed it and stowed it in the Room of Hidden Things without Dippet's knowledge. But I don't seriously think that he would have. I think if *he* had removed it, he'd have been more likely to have taken it and warded it in his quarters, or some place no one else had access to.

## Loose Canon

The subject had been banned. The book had been removed. Rowling is trying to cut corners and deny what she has already written, because she seems to have decided that what she had written was now inconvenient. Not for the last time, either.

Unfortunately some readers have better memories than that.

For that matter; If Albus had successfully agitated to get the subject banned, and this campaign took place before he became Headmaster, then it would not have been Albus, but Professor Dippet upon whose authority the books were removed from the library. And I am not convinced that Dippet would have simply handed them over to Albus for safekeeping. In fact he could hardly have done that if Tom had somehow managed to get hold of them anyway.

I am unsure of just what Rowling meant to accomplish by this attempt to pretend that she had not really written what she clearly did write. Because it would appear to serve no purpose other than to confuse the issue, and to anger those readers who object to being blatantly and disingenuously lied to.



Because she did eventually also make a point of giving us the information that Tom *had* known about the Room of Hidden Things, even if she waited until nearly the end of the book to do it. That information, even given so much later, renders the whole issue of who had managed to get hold of the book when completely unnecessary.

The most obvious line of reasoning is that Albus raised a stink about the subject being accessible to the students. Dippet agreed to this, and banned it, removing any book on the



## Loose Canon

subject to the Room of Hidden Things (he certainly didn't want them in *his* office), burying them in there among centuries of other banned subjects and materials. Slughorn told Tom the subject was banned, and Tom, who if he hadn't found the specific information already, almost certainly already knew about the Room of Hidden Things — having probably charmed the information out of one of the Hogwarts ghosts — went there to collect the references he was looking for. Probably with a simple “Accio,” as Hermione later did. He returned the book(s) when he was finished with them, and some years later when Albus was appointed Headmaster, and was given reason to start mulling over what Tom had been up to, he retrieved the books and removed them to his own study where they would be even less likely to be found by a student. By then of course it was already far too late.

Which renders Harry's claim that Sluggo had not said, what we all can go back and read that he *had* said, an authorial lie to no purpose whatsoever — other than to make us aware that the author is lying to us.



Another unnecessary issue raised in that particular conversation was to insert the question of how the Diary had managed to possess Ginny, and to extend this principle to all Horcruxes. This added confusion by deliberately complicating an issue which did not require it.

We had already been told in HBP (and had it implied to us several books earlier) that the Diary was designed as a *weapon*. This ought to have made it unique among Horcruxes. In fact

## Loose Canon

Albus claimed in HBP that the fact that the Diary was designed as a weapon as well as a Horcrux made it particularly *disturbing*.

But if *any* Horcrux will reach out and take possession of whoever is in contact with it, then what is so uniquely disturbing about the fact that the Diary reached out and took possession of Ginny Weasley? Isn't that now just what Horcruxes *do*?

Not to mention that this makes them *much* more easily recognizable as Horcruxes. Which is seriously counter-productive if the point is to conceal the fact that you've made one.

It all worked much more smoothly when Horcruxes were merely inert safeguards against death, and the Diary was somehow something worse. For one thing that would have not raised the question of whether Dolores Umbridge had been acting under any prompting other than her own general nastiness from being in contact with the Locket over the previous year.

Yes, that's right. Umbridge had been in contact with the Locket for something like a *year*. Mundungus Fletcher had stolen it from the house *before* Harry sent Kreacher off to the Hogwarts kitchens the summer previously. The Diary had eaten up Ginny Weasley within about three months.

We were never given any indication that Umbridge had been possessed. And if Rowling was going to gratuitously raise that possibility it is a question that ought certainly to have at least been *asked*.

But, no, being in contact with the Locket for a year hadn't even affected her ability to cast a Patronus.



Although in fairness to Rowling, I have to admit that this



## Loose Canon

issue raises some absolutely \*fascinating\* possibilities related to the question of why Tom Riddle found that he didn't want to go on wearing the Ring after he turned it into a Horcrux. Particularly when you stop and think of what the stone in that ring was capable of *before* he gave it an interactive interface.

Tom Riddle doesn't LIKE to be visited by echoes of the dead, you know. We saw that in the Little Hangleton graveyard...

If Rowling had resisted the impulse, we would have also been spared that incredibly lame replay of Frodo and Sam and the One Ring over the course of the camping trip from Hell. That was something else that was completely unnecessary. And while I am sure that fans of Christopher Lee and Vincent Price heartily enjoyed the little production of "The Last Temptation of Ron B. Weasley," I will have to admit that I found that to be cheesy and unnecessary as well.

e.g., Isn't "RETURN OF THE KING" the volume of LOTR that Rowling claims she never finished? Maybe if you cannot finish a book it isn't the best source of elements to lift and insert into your own stories.



On the other hand; redesigning the Horcruxes into little cut-rate versions of the One Ring does at least give theorists a clear line of reasoning to extrapolate just how Tom might have come to decide to create the Diary as a *weaponized* Horcrux. Especially if we can now expect *all* Horcruxes, or at least all of *Tom's* Horcruxes to be similarly "grabby."

It's very likely that Tom, who seems to be able to take possession of other living creatures without the need of a spell or a

## Loose Canon

wand, might very well generate Horcruxes that are particularly grabby in such a manner. They are, after all, generated by fragments of *his* soul.

I've said for years that the Diary was not one of the originally planned set. Nor was it one of the early ones created. I think it was the 5th of that set. Not created until something like early 1981.

I'd also say that he was given that idea some time, oh, say, around 1979, or early 1980.

After he'd entrusted the Cup to Bellatrix.

Bellatrix+Cup=OTP.

Is *that* part of what's wrong with Bellatrix? Getting it to turn her loose might have presented a bit of a problem. Particularly since that would have been the *last* thing that *she* wanted. Tom may have been at least somewhat amused, but I doubt that he'd have welcomed the potential competition. Or at least not coming from Bellatrix.

Once he got her loose from it, she was ordered to put it in her vault and leave it there. Probably with strong enough instructions that even after he disappeared she didn't dare retrieve it and give it another go.

But if this is the case, that could be the point that he may have decided that this might be a way to get himself into the school, remotely, for some useful mayhem, right under Dumbledore's crooked nose. (And possibly to eliminate Dumbledore at long-distance, for good measure.)

I'll admit that I'd still prefer to reject the One Ring theory of Horcruxes, but if entertained, that variant does at least come bearing a very useful housewarming gift.



## Loose Canon

I'm not sure I buy that Albus deliberately let his legacies to the trio pass through Ministry hands, but I suppose we'll just have to accept that too. But, really, with both the Hogwarts Staff and the Order at his command, and knowing he was going to be dead by the end of the year, you would think he could have found some rather more trusted messenger.

But of course we then wouldn't have needed the utter nonsense of learning that the school's athletic equipment possesses "flesh memory." How ever would we have coped without knowing that?

For a sport typically played in golves, too. Now isn't that just \*special\*?

And of course we all had to wait until all three of the trio were legally adults to learn that wizards have their own children's tales. She just *couldn't* introduce that novel concept in *Book 1*. Oh nooooo...

Which brings us to the wedding.

I will admit that it is rather fun to note that Luna recognized Harry immediately despite the Polyjuice.

From the description, one wonders whether the Weasley's Aunt Muriel is related to Irma Pince. (One of the people online insisted that Aunt Muriel had shown up at *her* wedding. This comment was met by the sally that Aunt Muriel shows up at *everybody's* wedding.)

## Loose Canon

\*sigh\* Maths. Elphias Doge claimed in the obituary he wrote for Albus that he had left on the Grand Tour alone, after Kendra's funeral, and returned later to find that his friend had sustained another tragedy. Now he is claiming to have attended Ariana's funeral as well, which was only two months after Kendra's. Not all that grand a tour after all, eh?

And infodumps galore.

Oh, I get it. Scrimgeour is supposed to be our token example of how a character can be on the right side without being nice. Or even particularly good. As well as being rather hateful. Nice to finally have that clear.

And of course that description couldn't be just as easily applied to anyone *else*...

Finally! *Finally*, (even if we aren't told about it for several more chapters) we get a rational justification for why people in the Potterverse might reasonably be reluctant to mention Lord Voldemort by name.

Of course that reason was never valid until the DEs actually took over the Ministry, since he seems to have needed the Ministry's full resources before he would be able to impose it, and he never seems to have come close to taking over the Ministry during his first rise. But I just guess everyone was getting into practice against the day he would...

Er, Moody? Would you explain to me how subjecting Snape (or anyone else) to a tongue-tying curse is supposed to slow down a master of nonverbal magic? *Any* master of nonverbal magic? That's standard sixth year curriculum, after all.



## Loose Canon

Which reminds me. What *happened* to nonverbal spellcasting? Wasn't that supposed to be somehow important? Everyone in this book appears to have forgotten that lesson. They're all screaming out their spells like a bunch of First Years.

And an Albus-boggart/surrogate seems a very lame security measure.

Also; Moody's dead. His spells are still *working*? What is that supposed to tell us?

Maths again? Or a little hint that being dead hasn't crimped Albus's style when it comes to lying? Lily's letter states that James is getting antsy about Albus not having returned his cloak by the time they held Harry's first birthday tea. At King's Cross Albus claims to have borrowed it only "a few days" before the Potters were killed.

Or is this just another hint that no one bothered to edit the manuscript at all?



Kreacher's Tale.

Oh ghod, of all the irrational stupidity. It's small wonder the Black family is all but extinct.

So, let me get this straight: Regulus boasted, in writing, of his intention to destroy the Locket, then suicided (unnecessarily, since it sounds like he didn't have to die. Kreacher could have taken him home to recover) in a grand gesture, in order to steal it, and made no attempt to destroy it whatsoever. Leaving it up to his House Elf to actually perform that task.

Yup. Sorted too soon, all right.

BTW, haven't we ever heard of something called a Bub-

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ble-Head Charm?



And we've lost track of the timeline again. Kreacher certainly spoke with "Miss Cissy" back in OotP, but "Miss Bella" was still in Azkaban until after Kreacher had returned to #12. The break-out wasn't until the end of the Christmas break. And Kreacher had turned up at #12 again before then.

And of course the DEs posted out in the square looking at the house and not seeing it, have shown up because people inside the house have been talking about Voldemort. Nothing to do with Snape at all. (Once Albus was dead, if Snape had told *anyone* about #12 they would have seen it. Nobody seems to remember that.)



The Trace: which evidently cannot be placed upon an adult. So will someone please explain to me why having the Trace — signaling underage magic — go off in the Riddles' sitting room should send Morfin Gaunt to Azkaban? Morfin is well beyond the age of setting off the Trace. (This one was pointed out to me by a correspondent. Thank you very much.) I guess the Trace somehow wasn't in use in '42. Despite it's being in response to legislation adopted in the 19th century. Or more probably the Trace is on the wand, not the wizard, and Tom used Morfin's wand. (So why not *say so*?)



And it was at this point, the point that Remus was delivering



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his infodump on the fall of the Ministry, that I was thrown out of the story completely. I never properly got all the way back in. "*Voldemort is playing a very clever game.*"

No he isn't. There is nothing clever about this pot of bilge.

Political coups simply do not take place in a week without protest.

How stupid does this author think I am?

I flatly don't believe it. Any of it. That is *not* what happened. This is no longer a "story." This is a dirty lie.



Oh, what's the use?

I don't believe this book. I don't *want* to believe this book. This book is a bloody insult. It isn't a story, it's a 759-page "fuck you" note.

It isn't just a case of the characters all succumbing to idiot plot disease (i.e., the plot only works if someone, or everyone, starts acting like idiots) but that the explanations for what actually happen don't make sense according to rules which she either already set up, or which are intrinsic to the nature of the elements she chose to use to facilitate it.

Voldemort stuffs a giant snake into a corpse to have it masquerade as an old woman, and the snake is able to make the corpse walk bipedally. Now how is that supposed to work? What is this, Tom Riddle and his amazing trained walking snake? Since when does a snake understand how to operate limbs? Tom has already groused to us about the fact that snakes can't handle wands. Not even when you are possessing them.

(ETA 2020: okay, okay, the corpse was an Inferus. The snake was directing it. It does not strain in-story plausibility for



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that *particular* snake to have been able to control one of Tom's Inferi. What strains plausibility is stuffing a 14-foot snake large enough to swallow an adult human being, inside the corpse of an old woman.)

And how long was that poor snake stuck in a corpse, in a village, waiting for Harry Potter to show up? It's winter. With snow on the ground. What's keeping the snake awake? Someone report this to the RSPCA.

And the snake can see, or at least sense H & H through the Cloak, too (Along with Moody, Albus and Peeves, real fine protection there). No explanation for that of course.

Unless Rowling just suddenly remembered that it is supposed to be a *snake*, and that snakes have amazing senses of smell.

While we're at it, We are directly told that none of the snakes that Tom had possessed in Albania lived very long afterwards, and Quirrell was dying before Tom had held him for a year. *Hel-loooooo*, making a snake a Horcrux is a \*permanent\* form of possession. Why is the snake still alive four years later. We're forced to make an exception for Harry, but I'll be damned if I'm going to strain myself making one for the snake.

So now we have a cold-blooded snake staking out a graveyard, in the snow, until someone *just happens* to show up to visit the Potters' grave, and hurrying home to put on her Bathilda disguise and hobble out to intercept the visitors at the Potter house. What if they had gone to the house first?

For that matter; unless Tom realizes that Potter is hunting for his Horcruxes — and Rowing is insistent that he didn't suspect that until after the Gringotts heist, why should he assume that Potter is going to be anywhere *near* Godric's Hollow at all?





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Just out of pure sentiment?

While we're at it, if Potter is serious about hunting Horcruxes, then yes, a trip to Godric's Hollow should be on the agenda. Albus did claim that Tom had intended to create one from Harry's death. Oughtn't they to check the house to be sure?

But they made NO determined effort to get *into* the house and *look* for a Horcrux, or anything suspected to have been used to create one from. Shouldn't they have gone back later, maybe before the Gringotts heist to be absolutely certain? Or sent someone from the Order? They might have at least told Bill and Fleur.

Snape's Patronus is a silver doe in honor of the woman who rejected him and whom he inadvertently got killed. Er, would somebody please explain to me how this constitutes "a single, very HAPPY memory"? This is Snape we're talking about, not Bellatrix. Or Umbridge.

(We couldn't have seen the Deluminator in action even *once* since Book 1 Chapter 1?)

Oh, wonderful. Voldemort now not only can fly like Superman, he can force himself through an arrow-slit window "*...like a snake and landed, lightly as vapor, inside the cell-like room—*" Well, of course it's "cell-like." This is a prison, and it's a CELL. Is that supposed to sound dramatic? It *doesn't*.

What is this story? Who is this villain? Did somebody rip out a few pages of 'DRACULA' and stick them in here by mistake? (Well, it certainly was a mistake, even if it was done on purpose.) Will Tom be crawling down the outside of the tower — head first — like a squirell next?

Ta-daa!! Harry manages to capture himself by speaking The Name, which "breaks all protective spells." Er, how many times

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did Harry say the forbidden name while they were all staying in #12, again? This tracing spell was already a factor back then. It's presumably how the DEs got onto them so fast in Tottenham Court Road, after all. You can't even tell us that speaking the name demolishes all protective spells *except* *Fidileus* and *pretend* to be making sense can you?

Excuse me, but Wormtail's own silver hand strangles him for failing to attack Harry Potter? I thought the whole point was that none of the DEs were supposed to attack Harry Potter? That Voldemort needed to kill him himself?

Dobby Apparates the prisoners and the trio to Shell Cottage. Isn't Shell Cottage supposed to be \*Secret Kept\*?

Oh. Now Snape is flying through the air like Superman, too. Isn't that just wonderful. It's not even something that we merely have to politely avert our eyes from because it's Riddle. Maybe Snape'll be the one crawling down the outsides of buildings, head first like a squirell.

The Snape-shaped hole in the window? Oh, Puh-leez! I don't know where Rowling's dittoheads get the nerve to kick such up a fuss when the people who are troubled by this book call it cartoonish. What division of Warner Bros. does Rowling think is going to be turning *this* into a movie? The animation division? Is Snape going to be played by Daffy Duck or Wile E. Coyote?

(Someone on the DHs sporking community on Lj has dubbed this whole book 'HARRY POTTER AND THE SNAPE-SHAPED HOLE'. That kind of says it all, doesn't it?)

The DHs sporking community is greatly recommended for those who are likely to appreciate it. This essay barely scratches the surface of the awful that is DHs. As of October, 2021 the



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comm was still online. You can probably still find it here:

<https://deadlyhollow.livejournal.com>

Ron and Hermione reappear with their arms full of Basilisk fangs. Excuse me, but venomous snakes only have 2, count them, 2 fangs. Fangs are not just big pointy teeth.

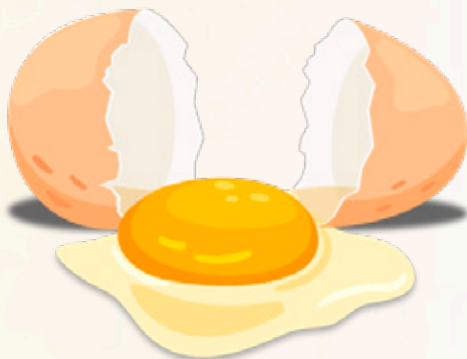
Ron Weasley can suddenly mimic Parseltongue well enough to open a door, but not well enough for an actual Parselmouth (Harry) to understand the noise he makes as language? *Right.*

And I just cannot go any further with this. I'm sure there are additional examples in the last five chapters. But I have had all I can take. My brain hurts.



Although I have to admit I really appreciate the verdict of the "list mom," Sydney Padua on the old Tea at Spinner's End board, that I was hanging out on when DHs was released. She says; "This is my favorite book in the series! It's so messed-up we can talk about it for YEARS!"

And y'know what? Some of us *have*.



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WELL!!

Well.

Weeeeell...

No. I'm sorry. All is NOT "well!"



### Dateline 2008:

So. Here we are, a year down the road from the release of the final book of the series.

People's reactions have mostly sorted themselves out, sometimes at a glacial pace, and people have been increasingly able to articulate just what those reactions actually were. Unfortunately, although one might have expected that the worst of the shock would be over by now, and everyone would reasonably be beginning to move on, from what I am observing, that expectation seems to have been grossly inadequate to the actual results.

The worst is not over at all. In fact, as time goes by and people become progressively *more* articulate about just what and how they are reacting to the series as a whole, the general dissatisfaction among a significant minority (or maybe it really is a majority) of the older fans only seems to be increasing.

And as if that were not awkward enough, a counter-reaction appears to be gaining a groundswell, too. Some of this groundswell lot didn't even like the final book all that much themselves. But the initial whinging annoyed them — which was reasonable enough — and the steadily growing articulation of the sustained dissatisfaction has prompted them to make a determined effort to smother it. I do not know whether these are mostly people





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who are simply being pushed out of shape by the general lack of “nice,” or whether it’s the fact that having now expressed our dissatisfaction, we have not simply gone away leaving the field to the “JK Rowling, right or wrong,” fans that offends them.

Yes, I said “we.” You are all welcome to add me to the ever-growing list of fans who do not regard ‘HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS’ as a fitting conclusion to the series.

It isn’t. On the strength of Rowling’s earlier performance, I think we had a right to expect better from her.

And, frankly, being perfectly capable of coming up with no shortage of snotty rejoinders of my own, I find myself tempted to tell the “groundswollen” to “just go away” themselves if they are so perfectly convinced that there is nothing more to be said on the subject because Rowling’s word is law. If there is nothing to be said, why are *they* still hanging around.

If that were the case, clearly, no one would feel any need to say anything, whatsoever.

Including the writing of fanfic. However, that reaction does not seem to be my experience, and neither does it seem to be a lot of other fans’ experience, either.

And I think one might as well get used to the fact that the dissatisfied are NOT necessarily going to be going away any time soon, so the whole thing is all just bound to get worse for a while. We, the disappointed, indeed, the *offended*, have just as much invested in this series as any of the Rowling-worshippers. And permit me to point out that to think that the final book was a train wreck doesn’t mean you retroactively reject the whole series.

For my own part; I’m still not altogether convinced that the

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“carpet book” *isn’t* a hoax on at least some — perhaps even unconscious — level, after all. Although I am fully aware that the Carpet Book is all we are likely to get. Short of writing our own.

Frankly, I find it difficult to regard DHs as even being a part of the same series, as things now stand. Even the style of the writing in it (to say nothing of the style of the reasoning) does not line up to that of the previous six books, and it hardly connects at all to the two books that preceded it, and with which one would have reasonably expected it to have been most closely intertwined. Rowling may not have ever been a “brilliant” writer from a purely technical standpoint, but much of the storytelling (let alone the grammar) dumped on the reader in the final book is barely even competent. HBP was widely accused of “reading like fanfic” when it came out, but this was a truly jarring downward transition even from HBP. This was no “controlled descent,” this was a flat-out “crash and burn.”

I find myself still trying to determine just where it all went wrong. It’s irresistible. Like picking at a scab.



It wasn’t until after I had already uploaded the whole revised collection back at the end of October 2007 that I finally came to the conclusion that the reason Book 7 doesn’t seem to fit the rest of the series, is because *it really doesn’t fit*. It really *isn’t* a part of the same series. You can make a fairly good argument that with Book 7 Rowling simply stepped outside of telling us a fantasy adventure story, and engaged in a bit of “therapeutic” writing.

In the course of which, after six books of “displacement activity,” she at last braced herself, rolled up her sleeves, set Albus up



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as a punching bag, set Harry up as her own avatar, and finally came to grips with the psychodrama of bringing herself to the point of being able to forgive a god who remained out of reach, wouldn't answer a question directly, wouldn't explain his plans, and had just sat back and let her mother die.

Which, considering that the whole Potterverse project is where she hid out during a time that she could hardly bear to deal with a world in which her mother was unfairly, and far too early dead, makes a certain kind of emotional sense, but psychodrama doesn't always make for very satisfying stories for anyone but the person directing them. (Note: *I* am the one directing *this* enterprise, and you are thereby warned.)

It also doesn't necessarily blend that well with all of those "other things" that you have been using to distract yourself from coming to grips with the main issue, either.

The main problem of course, is that therapy is a field in which one size manifestly does not fit all, and the average reader did not need to take an active part in JK Rowling's private grief therapy, but found themselves dragged into it whether they wanted to be or not. For Rowling, the experience may actually have been a resounding success. But the exercise wasn't exactly a *story*. And it certainly wasn't the *same* story we thought we had contracted to read.



One thing, at least, is evident. This is an issue where the average fanfic author has a tremendous advantage over JK Rowling.

Most fanficers use betas. In fact they are strongly *encouraged* to use betas.

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Fanfic betas discuss the story's development with the author as it is being written. When effectively deployed, they can help the author identify potential dead ends or plot holes, and they can suggest solutions. If you've got a good beta (or more than one) they can help make the story so much stronger than it would be if you just locked yourself in a room and wrote until you finished it.

Rowling couldn't do this. The wizard locked up in his tower with a Great Work in train had nothing on JK Rowling.

My understanding (which is admittedly inexperienced and at 2nd-hand) is that professional editors usually only deal with the manuscript after it is finished. They might discuss things with their authors while a work is in progress if the author *asks* them to, but generally they deal with finished manuscripts rather than works in progress.

When your series of seven children's novels has morphed into a mega-media event, and people are wagering large sums of money on the outcome of the story, any potential leaks have become a major issue. So you just *do not* discuss the story with outsiders. And I am not convinced that you can rely on someone in your editors' office not to leak information, either. Leaks can be well-paid, either in legal tender of the realm, or in notoriety, which to some people is just as valuable. So you just don't take chances.

Which right there may say something about the source of the veritable inundation of readily-fixable problems that we've had in the last three books in the series. Rowling didn't have a beta, and the publishers' attempt to hermetically seal the creative process, to deter leaks, stifled it, instead.



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Unfortunately, Rowling also claims not to reread her own work after it has been published. And I think we can probably take that statement at face value too. Even if it does make her come across as a zip-damn fool.

Lack of a beta surrogate could also account for the increasingly shallow and melodramatic tone of the last three books. And the increasingly confused rendering of their climaxes. Good editors (or betas) also help to steer an author away from excesses of tone. Rowling apparently needs a firm editor, and she didn't have one.

She did *have* an editor (probably more than one) for the first four books. Even if not particularly *good* ones. We know this to be the case. She described various editorial changes to the first four books on her first official website. But I didn't see any mention there of any editorial changes made to the last three.

And, for that matter, I don't get the impression that either HBP or DHs were edited at all. Proofread, maybe, but not edited.

Once you start viewing the last three volumes of the series as un-betaed fic, many of the problems a lot of us have with them fall right into place.



Not that I hadn't a fair share of misgivings before the last book came out. HBP had a lot of problems. Many of them readily avoidable. OotP undoubtedly did too, but they weren't quite as noticeable since the story hadn't veered so far off track yet. In retrospect, the overriding problem with OotP is that virtually nothing we were given in the course of it turned out to be of the slightest significance later. And there was no way of

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knowing that until we got our hands on the last two books. In retrospect, much of that book turns out to have been a colossal waste of our time. You cannot say that of any of the earlier books. Particularly the first three books. Each of those books gave us something to build upon.

OotP just gave us a lot of distractions that kept us occupied until HBP came out.

And HBP compounded that problem in spades. That book was disgracefully padded. I find it hard to decide whether it even *\*had\** a plot. Really. The only plot in that book appears to have been Draco Malfoy's.

And, as anyone might have predicted: with the announcement of the title of the 7th book, the internet exploded in speculation.

The forthcoming final book of the series was to be entitled: 'HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS'.

As I say; I had misgivings.

For one thing, do you think she could have come up with something tackier if she tried as hard as she could with both hands for a week?

I was so not impressed.

Not that I thought it was likely to really matter. When you take a clear overview, Rowling's books had stopped being "about" their titles after PoA.

PoA came out in 1999. It also was the last book of the series to escape before the media blitz became international and really kicked into top gear. Even though GoF came out only one year later, by the time it saw the light of day the fan community had grown into an entirely different environment. Where the first



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three books were run-away successful children's books, the 4th was a media "event."

That was also the point at which the amount of necessary background information required by the story threw the page count out of control. And it was also the point that the editors lost their grip on their purpose. There were indeed edits in GoF, but already, meeting the release date had become paramount, and the book escaped with some real problems. In retrospect, I think this is probably the point at which the series really began to go off the rails. And also when I think that Rowling just plain burned out. Which was hardly surprising.

Plus, Warners had already started courting Rowling, and she was beginning to "write for the movies." It was not a beneficial influence to the quality of the story. A novelist is supposed to *tell the story*, not describe camera angles and the special effects you want to show off selected scenes with.

And there was so much going on inside the series by that time that I think it slipped notice that the books were no longer about their titles.

A widely-known working title for GoF had been 'HP & THE DOOMSPELL TOURNAMENT'. That must have been a fairly late working title, because that one actually went public before the book was released and the final title of; "Goblet of Fire" came as a bit of a surprise to everyone. A title of "Doomspell Tournament" would have been at least as central to the story as "Prisoner of Azkaban" had been. It would have also been every bit as tacky and melodramatic as "Deathly Hallows." (I think we can probably take it that the tackiness and melodrama are native to Rowling herself. I doubt that any editor would have

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come up with something like that.)

Goblet of Fire was not. The Goblet also didn't have a whole lot to do with the story. The Goblet of Fire played the role of an inanimate Sybil Trelawney. It was carried in, got confused, spouted something that tossed Harry into the soup, boogied off, and we never saw it again. We didn't need to. Everyone just had to deal with the mess. It was the McGuffin. It wasn't the story. In fact, looking back, it was one of a far too extensive series of disposable plot devices; use once and discard.

The Order of the Phoenix was the same thing. Harry was escorted from the Dursleys to Order Headquarters by a group of the Order's members. He was introduced to them and spent the rest of the summer under their protection.

Did he join the Order? No. Was he asked to join? No. Did he take part in their plans? No. Did he interact with the members of the Order in the course of their duties in any meaningful manner throughout the entire book? Nope. Not even that. He spoke to his Godfather and Remus a couple of times, but he'd have tried to do that anyway, Order or no Order.

The Order was just about totally irrelevant to the course of Harry's own story — until they finally showed up like the 7th cavalry to rescue Harry and his friends when they had disobeyed their instructions to stay out if it and not meddle with Albus's scam *du jour*. The Order was some bright, shining promise of inaccessible adventure out on the periphery. It was not the *story*. It never *became* the story.



I will have to concede that the Half-Blood Prince was a



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somewhat different proposition, and at least he was with us pretty much throughout the whole book, but he wasn't the story either. Or not the *main* story.

He surfaced early in the year and was Harry's little helper, very much as Tom had pretended to be Ginny's "friend that she could carry around in her pocket." Except that the Prince wasn't pretending anything; the fellow scribbling in the Potions book didn't interact with Harry at all. He didn't know that Harry existed. And, indeed, at the time "the Prince" was recording his findings in that book, Harry *didn't*.

And while Harry was happy to take the Prince's potions advice and use his spells, once he realized that there was no way that the *half-blood* Prince could have been his own pure-blooded father, he didn't much care who the Prince might have actually been. Although he couldn't help being a *bit* curious.

Not nearly as curious as he was over what Malfoy was up to, though.

It was Hermione who got the bit between her teeth and was determined to prove to Harry that the Prince was *not* the splendidly clever fellow that Harry thought he was, and kicking up a continuing mystery over his identity. And that was primarily because the Prince had her nose thoroughly out of joint. (Hermione seems to have gone through the whole of Year 6 in a jealous snit over one thing or another.)

And by the time we got *our* noses rubbed in the Prince's true identity, it didn't really matter. It was a nice little slap in the face for Harry — who one rather *wanted* to slap by that time — to discover that his mysterious Prince was only a teenaged Severus Snape, but Harry had already learned his lesson that

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the Prince was just as dangerous as any other wizard, and that to blindly follow anyone is likely to prove to be a mistake (a lesson he did not think to apply to Albus). We were never even told whether he took the trouble to rescue the potions book from the Room of Hidden Things later in hopes that it might reveal some of his "enemy's" secrets. The impression one is left with is that once he found out who the Prince was, he couldn't care less about the Prince OR his secrets.

Unlike the Order, however, the Prince himself *did* take an active (if unconscious) part throughout the book which bears his name. Ron would not have survived if Harry hadn't had access to the Prince's book. Nor would Harry have won the bottle of Felix that enabled him to retrieve the critical memory from Slughorn, or to get his closest friends through the first "Battle of Hogwarts" unscathed.

But the story wasn't really *about* the Prince the way PoA was about Sirius Black. It was about Malfoy's mission, padded with the gaudy distraction of the official Riddle backstory. The Prince, scribbling away in the margins of his own textbook back in the 1970s, had nothing to do with either of those.

In fact, by the end of the volume it was clear that the whole Half-Blood Prince subplot was completely irrelevant to the story of what was going on during Harry Potter's 6th year at Hogwarts. Harry had stumbled into a few situations where he desperately needed access to some of the information in the Prince's old potions text, but he never needed to know the Prince's identity. If there was any reason at all for Harry needing to know that the book was Snape's old potions text, that was a shoe that had yet to fall. In fact, it is a shoe that never *did*



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fall. The whole issue simply didn't matter.

So, I thought that we might be putting way too much emphasis on the Deathly Hallows of the final book's title. We would encounter them, certainly, (whatever they were), and they would probably be pivotal in some manner or other. But the story would probably not be primarily about them. Either they would be the McGuffin that kicks off a major part of the adventure, or they will be some gaudy peripheral issue that Harry cannot access, until the final showdown.

(Boy howdy, did I ever call *that* one correctly.)



As long as we are playing around with the books' titles, maybe we ought to make a list of the titles we've got and take a capsule look at them all before moving on:

All of 3 (the first three) out of the 7 titles were of things that Harry legitimately needed to find, or find out what they were, or confront, in order to discover how they related to what Voldemort, or whoever the enemy *du jour* was up to.

**Philosopher's Stone:** it was the target/bait. Harry had to find out what it was before he could know that Voldemort was after it. Unfortunately, he then decided that he had to personally keep Voldemort from getting it. He ought to have followed orders and just kept out of the whole business, since his interference only made a bad situation worse, but he did not realize that. Many readers still don't.

**Chamber of Secrets:** Harry needed to find out what it was, find out *where* it was, get *into* it (for which he was uniquely qualified), and then neutralize the monster in it that was

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attacking people. Until he found it he couldn't do anything to put an end to the situation.

**Prisoner of Azkaban:** Harry thought he needed to keep Sirius Black from finding him. Actually he needed to confront Black in order to learn the truth about his parents' deaths.

**Goblet of Fire:** the Goblet was the McGuffin that pitched him into the action. I *suppose* you could say that he needed to find out who had rigged it. But mostly he just needed to rise to the challenge it threw at him and keep from getting himself killed. The Goblet was anything but central to the story.

**Order of the Phoenix:** Harry didn't really need to do anything in Year 5 but keep his head down, his mouth shut, and pay attention to his schoolwork. Later, he needed to learn to block out Voldemort's interference with his mind. He didn't do a focused job of *any* of these. And ultimately (as in PS/SS), he exceeded his authority and made a bigger mess of matters than necessary, even though it did put an end to an ongoing situation which had been ongoing for far too long. But the Order just showed up like the 7th cavalry to pull him out of the mess he'd managed to get himself into.

**Half-Blood Prince:** Harry needed to ignore the distractions and pay attention to Albus's assignments. Yes, he was fascinated by the novelty of the Prince's secret spells and potions instructions, but he had comparatively little interest in finding out who the Prince actually was, once he realized the Prince couldn't be his own father, James Potter. It was Hermione who was determined to follow that thread.

What Harry was running after in Year 6 was the question of what Malfoy was up to. From where Harry was standing,



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Malfoy had no connection to the HBP of the potions book whatsoever. And, again, this was a situation Harry had been told repeatedly to keep out of.

Interestingly, when he finally got his nose rubbed in the answer to the mystery of just who the Prince was, it was the *last* thing he wanted to know. So the whole big mystery of who the HBP was eventually just boiled down into the punch line of a rather ironic joke on Harry.

**Deathly Hallows:** the Hallows were Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald's little obsession nearly a century earlier. They had absolutely nothing to do with the underlying problem of Tom Riddle, although, interestingly, Tom had managed to get hold of one of the "Hallows" without having any idea of what it was. Albus, who in the last year of his life now knew where all three of the Hallows were, convinced himself that they might give Harry an edge and made a half-arsed effort to see to it that Harry should find out what they were, and to try to make them all accessible to him.

He couldn't be bothered to do the job in a straightforward *manner*, of course, and that Harry finally ended up in possession of them at all owed far more to authorial fiat than to Albus. I'm not convinced Harry, or any of us, needed to actually know about them, although Harry would still have needed some plot device or other form of assistance to get him past the Demen-tors to keep his suicide appointment with Tom. And it seems in the cards that he was always going to be escorted to that meeting by his parents.



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That said, during the final waiting period before DHs came out, the more I re-examined things, the more I committed to the probability that the expected Snape confrontation would have to be traversed successfully before the showdown with Voldemort. The longer I considered the matter, and the more the specific example of PoA was examined, the more likely it seemed that Snape was going to be the one to give Harry some key element or information that Harry was going to need before he would be able to face Voldemort with any hope of success.

And I called that right too. Not that the issue was ever really in doubt.



Permit me to make a pause, and state here and now that J.K. Rowling is an *aggravating* writer. She never comes right out and *tells* you what you think you need to know. I've come to the conclusion that it's deliberate to some degree. And it does certainly engage the reader more than the passive "sit back and I'll tell you a story" approach.

By the spring of 2006, my respect for Rowling's skills in plotting was gradually recovering from the shocks of HBP. It never quite reached its former high point, before DHs blew it away altogether, but then I always have been quick to point out that we were, after all, dealing with a new, basically inexperienced writer who had yet to manage to finish telling her first story. And since at least what at first appeared to be two of the most egregious contradictions in HBP's storyline, on closer examination turned out to look like they could be fairly major clues to fairly major issues, I was once again inclined to recommend





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extending her the benefit of the doubt.

I was even willing to entertain the notion that she may have actually had a convincing reason for spending five and a half books setting up the contention that you cannot Apparate or Disapparate anywhere in Hogwarts Castle — which Dumbledore confirms on pg. 60 of the U.S. HB edition of HBP — then underscoring this by informing us that the Headmaster personally lifted these restrictions for the Apparition class in the Great Hall — and only in the Great Hall, and only for the duration of the lesson — and then turns around and claims that Montague, who hadn't even managed to pass the Ministry's test for an Apparition license, somehow managed to Apparate into Hogwarts from the cabinet. (No such luck.)

However, we already had some clear signs that she isn't as good at tying off a tale as she is at spinning one out. This is not an uncommon problem for a reader to encounter, and one that even outstanding authors may be prone to.

But she did now appear to be stacking the deck against herself.



Imho, neither of the previous two books had really been all that satisfying, and the endings of the previous three (#s 4, 5, & 6) were all unnecessarily muddled and melodramatic. Rowling does not have a sound touch for drama. She keeps going for flashy when she would have a far more powerful statement by sticking to simple.

Plus, a lot of her imagery is right out of video games, which, I'll admit that at my age I have a hard time regarding as a legitimate art form, regardless of how clever the special effects or

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sophisticated the animation.

The fact remains that the printed word is not animated.

For that matter, computer whiz-bangs do not constitute a *story*, dammit. And, when irrelevant, they do not *improve* a story either. They are distracting, they are annoying, and they are the kind of cheap shot that even very good writing would have a difficult time pulling off. From a purely technical standpoint, Rowling's writing skills are not up to that.

The previous three books were also where the series spun completely out of control. And the balance seems to be somehow off in all of them. GoF has problems (largely due to its ludicrous premise, and the fact that in retrospect, virtually nothing which was originally assumed to be jumping-off spots for future action turned out to be anything of the sort) which may or may not be partially due to the major retrofit that Rowling claims she had to perform in the middle of it, on a deadline, after a grueling 1 year = 1 book schedule which had gone on for 4 years.

OotP was so thoroughly out of balance that every time Dolores Umbridge showed up I just wanted to quit reading, and had to push through a wall of resistance. Encountering one of the villains of the piece ought not to make the reader want to quit reading a book! When this happens, something has gone *badly* wrong. You need to keep track of villains. They are what drives the story.

HBP was much easier to get through than OotP, which was a relief, but it drove me nuts with all of its contradictions to earlier canon and the persistent failure to build *anything* on top of any of the foundation of new information that had been laid in OotP.

And the book itself was *disgracefully* padded. However



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offended I may have been at the discovery that I'd been sold a series of school stories about a teenaged dropout, by the time DHs was pending I had finally concluded that by HBP Rowling seemed to have been fed up with the whole school story framework herself.

The school story framework no longer really served the story she seemed to be trying to tell, either. The subplot of HBP does not have anything to do with the central plot, and the plot, subplot, and background information which she seemed to be trying to give us over the course of the book all appear to have been arbitrarily stretched out over the framework of a school year, stapled down in the few places where a handful of key incidents were allowed to happen, and the gaps filled in with Quidditch woes and chest monsters.

Neither of which advanced the plot At All.

Dumbledore could have shown Harry the whole Pensieve presentation of the Life and Times of Tom Marvolo Riddle by Halloween, certainly by the Christmas break. Instead he drags it out until about what, April? Rowling is presumed to have had a story to tell us, and she made it fit into one school year, but she really didn't have *enough* \*story\* to fill a full school year — given the amount of information she still wanted to keep holding out on us. We ended up spending much of the book spinning our wheels and being bored to death by 'shipping developments. All of which were played strictly for laughs, when they really weren't at all funny.

And having the Half-Blood Prince turn out to just be Severus Snape did nothing but please the Snape fans by giving them an "überSnape" to play with for a couple of years. At the end of

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which time Rowling snatched him away, and wouldn't let them keep him, when they really wanted to.

Instead, he got replaced somewhere in the middle of in DHs by clueless!Emo!Snape, who came out of nowhere and doesn't seem to even have the potential to develop into the "half-blood Prince" — who we are now supposed to believe was the \*same person\* writing his clever little spells and brilliant potions procedures in his textbook *at the very same time* that this gormless new iteration was being nagged and browbeaten by a "best friend" who was looking for an excuse to dump him. I'm sorry, but the Snape of 'The Prince's Tale' is simply *not* the same person as the Half-Blood Prince of HBP *at all*.

And, after the fact, it really doesn't even turn out to matter what the true identity of the Half-Blood Prince was for the purposes of the story. The whole discovery serves only as the punch line of a protracted joke on Harry. (And just possibly to underscore the fact that when the subject is Snape, Harry *never* seems to get it right.) It's the tail of a shaggy-dog story. If there ever was a purpose to it, it never managed to surface. Once that sinks in, the whole exercise becomes just plain *annoying*.

We can tell when we are being palmed off with fluff.



Smoke and mirrors.

There is just way too much smoke and mirrors in this series. I was finally beginning to be relieved by the prospect of Harry not returning to class in Book 7. I hoped that maybe without forcing the final segment into the artificial frame of the school year, Rowling would finally settle down and tell the story with-



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out the kind of dreary time-wasting that she subjected us to in HBP. And give us some decent *pacing* for heaven's sake.

(Oh, if only, if only. Instead, she decided she had to string the action out over the time required to get us through Tonks's pregnancy. It was only once little Teddy Lupin was properly born that she finally stopped farting around and finished the story off in a rush.)

By the beginning of 2007, I truly suspected that the whole 6th book was a massive piece of misdirection. Rowling had blindfolded us, spun us around, and pointed us in the wrong direction.

That much would be allowable. But then she went farther, and got up our collective noses by ignoring or dismissing all of the issues that she had raised in OotP and had flagged as *important*. Metamorphomagi? Get over it, Tonks is just another silly, lovesick *girl*. The Locked Room in the DoM? Legilimency and Occlumency? *The Veil*?

*Fuggedaboutit!* Doesn't *matter*. *None* of that stuff matters. At the end of the series it *still* doesn't matter.

At least one of them OUGHT to have mattered.

We'd been faithfully following along, like good little fans, for anything up to a decade, gathering up all the clues and hints she dropped and trying to sort them out and piece them together into a coherent pattern, and she suddenly blew us a raspberry, mocks us with a deliberately silly teen lurve soap opera, and introduced a whole new storyline. (Which she then blew off in turn, and dragged us all off into a season of winter camping and grief therapy.)

We spent three bloody years of our lives waiting for Book 5

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and now she tells us that nothing that was in it *matters*?! That what really matters is these new Horcruxy things?

*Of course* we're offended.

As readers we enjoy being tricked, especially if the trick is clever. Why on earth would people read murder mysteries otherwise? But this wasn't even clever. It was *insulting*.

It took a while to recover our balance.



It was during this interlude that I belatedly came to the realization that reading the Harry Potter series is rather like watching 'MOULIN ROUGE'. Both are obviously cobbled together of predominantly recycled elements. Rather trite elements at that. Interspersed with intentional silliness.

So here we have a musical with songs that were never designed to relate to one another, dance numbers that never quite ever materialize, and the whole tied to a transparently thin and basically ludicrous storyline, with huge set pieces that are just sort of *there* without any really convincing logic to them at all.

'MOULIN ROUGE' is fractionally more cynical and self-consciously "ironic" in its presentation, and Potter a tad more conservative-minded and mean-spirited, but both are highly entertaining. And both are such awkward bundles of *stuff* that it is laughably easy to find a hook somewhere in there to hang a potential "meaning" upon.

Rowing has demonstrated a fine talent for assembling pre-existing elements into an entertaining package. Her writing skills unfortunately, are fairly basic, which can be a bit frustrating. I wish that I could see what someone with really *good*



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writing skills could have done with the same elements. But that is something that none of us will ever see. Or not out where we can recognize it, probably (outside of fanfic. There is every chance of finding it there, but you will need to look hard).

But even all those years ago I was beginning to wonder whether the fact that Rowling was such a newbie may not be the reason she had managed to keep the balls spinning in the air as long as she did. Her experience at writing wasn't varied enough to be aware that it usually doesn't work that way.



I'm afraid I've come more and more around to the opinion that Rowling is the kind of author who simply doesn't *think* about what she's saying. So to look for an analytical interpretation of anything in the series is probably an exercise in frustration. She paints what is intended as impressive word pictures — essentially vignettes — mainly on the basis of how they are supposed to push your buttons and make you *feel*, without ever considering what they actually *say* or how they are supposed to fit together. This sometimes produces a considerable emotional impact, if you are at all sensitive to that kind of jerking around, but it doesn't necessarily make *sense*. And sometimes they just plain backfire. Such as when Snape and Yaxley meet in a dark lane, enter through a gate, cross a dark garden, are admitted into a dimly lit entry hall, and are ushered into a sitting room lit only by a roaring fire, and then pause for their eyes to adjust \*to the "lack of light"\* WTF?! Aren't their eyes *already* attuned to low light? If anything, they ought to be letting their eyes adjust to the light of that roaring fire.



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Quite a few of these issues are still slowly coming into focus. And one of the sharpest is the awareness that the world Rowling assembled is simply a lot bigger than the narrow-focused, smug, anglo-centric view of it she gave us.

Because when you come right down to it, it becomes clear that she never really intended to build a solid secondary world to put her story in. She simply didn't do the groundwork. Instead, she has ended up with this weird amalgamation that she threw together — which is highly detailed in some areas, and only vaguely sketched in elsewhere with several great gaping holes where you least expect them, to fall right out of the story through.

But, back when she first assembled this pretend world, she used the best possible materials available.

She mined folklore, and classic (written) tales that have been pretty fully absorbed by the culture, as well as ancient myth, and symbolism that has been around for millennia, she mimicked the authentically traditional "tropes" of how stories are put together and how they work, and she did it with a free hand. But I'm no longer convinced that she did it all *consciously*. I think she slung a lot of them together because they just "felt" right together. Sure, sometimes she tweaked them before she deployed them, or renamed them, or trivialized the hell out of them (unicorns are NOT sweet, innocent one-horned horsies. They aren't even *equines*. They're *monsters*), but she hardly ever invented anything new. Most of her elements already existed. The only thing in the Potterverse that is really original are some of her combinations. And, of course, the Dementors.

Consequently, as I say, she ended up with something that is





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a *lot* bigger than she is. And which upon first encounter comes across as a lot more erudite than she probably really is too, because all of the elements she used to build it came already equipped with their own baggage, and a whole pre-existing collection of associations which all originally *led* someplace. And most of them are so widely known and/or so universal that even with a 2nd, or 3rd-rate, or *incomplete* education, you are able to recognize them, and are at least somewhat aware of what those particular elements usually *mean*.

And the components are all thoroughly documented, so you can readily find out what the original source meant if you are at all curious. But that doesn't mean that *she* ever intended to include any of that material. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is certainly bigger than the shallow, petty, and mean-spirited viewpoint that she keeps pushing into the foreground and expecting us to use as a lens.

And it's very small wonder that — now she has invited the public to come and check it out by getting it published, a lot of the fans are determined to keep it for themselves.

It's small wonder that — even as awkward and incomplete as her version is — once a lot of fans find their way into the Potterverse, they aren't in the least bit ready to leave just because Harry's story is allegedly told.

They want to explore this incomplete world, and have a go at patching some of the holes themselves.

By that point, closing off Harry's story was as welcome as being finally rid of an irritating docent who keeps going on and on about the glories of the accomplishments of one modern splinter group when what you want to do is to examine the

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base that the splinter group was building upon.



But, then, I'm also noting that there have been any number of other writers in the past 45 years or so who break into the field and then settle down to writing series fiction, and it takes several books before it gradually dawns on you that they are just writing the same story over and over. In Rowling's case, she's still been writing the same story, and it really *is* the same story! Or at least it was *supposed* to be the same story. The acid test will be when she tries to write something else, and we then see whether that turns out to be the same story too.



But the thing is that the story that we've now got does pretty heavily resemble the teen soap opera that a lot of the fans disparaged it as after working their way through HBP. This world is missing large chunks of the necessary foundation, and various of what looked like major elements have never been explained any more than Sateen's elephant (i.e., why an *elephant*?) — until you have to wonder whether these even are *real* elements of the story, or just set-dressing deployed to serve as local color, or a vaguely looming threat in the background.

While the series was still open, we could still hope that there would be a payoff due regarding the inconsistencies. And we expected that there would be for at least *some* of them. But we knew there wouldn't be for all of them. There were just too many of them by then.

And I think it was the fact that the series was so close to its



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recycled components which is why so many fans read it, were entranced by the character (stereo)types' interactions, and decided; "Hey, I can do that!" And in a remarkably high percentage of the time, they *could*. There is a reason why the Potterverse has spawned so much fanfiction.

But "story" in itself is not "literature." Yes, it is an essential *component* of literature. Literature cuts and polishes story and deploys it like the central gem in a well-designed piece of jewelry. The Potter series is practically pure story, given just enough facets to make it sparkle, and then dumped naked into the marketplace. All of the veils of "literary meaning" that have been draped around it by its more serious-minded fans, most of whom were familiar with the components that Rowling built her world from, were just as likely as not to turn out to be hallucinations. And many of them have.

And yes, my respect for Rowling as a writer suffered a major hit after HBP, since it appeared that she spent most of the book contradicting everything that she had spent the previous 5 books establishing. Particularly things she had only *just* established in OotP — which we had waited for three years to get our hands on. I felt like I had been caught in a nasty little piece of bait-and-switch, and I was Not Amused.

After 2–3 months, however, I finally began to recognize that some of the most infuriating of these contradictions could just possibly have been clues. And if those were, some others may be as well. And some of the apparently irrelevant details dropped in passing might not be irrelevant at all.

Which harks back to my contention that all too often Rowling appears to make some form of vague pronouncement and

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leave the burden of actually sorting out what it means, and effectively "writing the story" to the reader.

I did suspect that not all of the maybe-clues that I was noting would turn out to be anything of the sort. But I thought a *few* of them probably would. Up to that point I seemed to have had a 1 out of 3 track record for accuracy. Which may be less than half, but isn't all that bad, considering.

But while my respect for the overall planning of the series had *mostly* recovered, my respect for the handling of the material had not. The actual writing was clumsy and becoming excessively melodramatic. And I thought her editors ought to be smacked. *Hard*. (Which goes double, in spades, after DHs. I don't think anyone even *tried* to edit that book.)

But a story gem is still a story gem, even if it is badly cut and rattling about loose in a cardboard box painted with tacky seaside slogans.



As rather more a point of concern; by the end of HBP Rowling appeared to have now evicted herself from an environment which she had proved that she could handle engagingly, and leaped into the middle of one, i.e., high quest fantasy, which requires an entirely different skill set, and is, moreover, a form that she was now publicly claiming in interviews that she didn't particularly like.

Nothing in any of the 3300 pages that she had given us to that point suggested that she possessed the necessary skills to be able to bring off a piece of high quest fantasy with any kind of style or coherence, and while her tendency to "embrace the



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cheese” may work in film, especially in the sort of neo-“matinee movie” genre exemplified by George Lucas and early Spielberg, on paper, embracing the cheese is apt to come across as merely, well, *cheesy*.

Part of the problem, of course, is that Rowling is good enough at what she *is* good at, that it tends to raise expectations to a higher level than her purely technical skills can be depended upon to deliver. Fans keep getting taken up short by the fact that she simply *isn't* good at *everything*.

And very little that I'd seen to that date suggested to me that she *hadn't* finally bitten off more than she could chew. I simply did not quite have the necessary confidence in her technical ability to wrap this story up as well as it needed to be. Even if my respect for her skill at plotting was on the mend.

The problem here, is that *plotting* isn't *writing*.

By then, however I had also recalled that when we finally got OotP into our hands, it had seemed to present a jarring shift of tone and story from the four previous books too — although the plot *itself* appeared to be a linear extension of the previous books.

So I began to wonder whether in OotP Rowling introduced us to only half of the problem, with the opposite half being what she gave us in HBP; the two halves scheduled to finally collide in Book 7.

I supposed that it was at least a viable hypothesis. It was certainly blatantly obvious that in OotP we weren't getting the full story. And there was a lot obviously going on off the page in HBP as well. But I was reluctant to count on it.

Plus, in HBP we got a heavy dose of the down side of a grown woman spinning together a story from an outline that was orig-

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inally hammered out over a decade earlier by a 20-something. The headings and subheadings may not have changed. But the infill appeared to have shifted.

We'd also been left with enough odd, dangling strings, and loose ends, and clues apparently pointing to nowhere to conclude that some of these may be artifacts of abandoned plot elements that simply never developed and that she would never manage to get back to. Which had injected unnecessary confusion into the story, and is untidy.



As a theorist; sifting minutia is a large part of my standard approach to reading the previous six installments of the Adventure of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord (or; 'HARRY POTTER AND THE SEVEN RIDDLES', as it has been dubbed by one Live-Journalist, and is a title I rather like). Consequently I've stumbled across more than one of these suspected bits of flotsam, although there are undoubtedly plenty more of them that I have either dismissed or overlooked.

Of course not all fans are theorists, and not all fans are fixated on issues of misfitting minutia, or the lazy logic of claiming that the story is about choices, when your villain has been set up as a raging (and apparently hereditary!) sociopath who, from birth, was manifestly *incapable* of making proper choices, nor of the enshrined hypocrisy of just about every one of her protagonists.

No, unfortunately. Post HBP, many were convinced that any objections anyone might have to the direction the series was taking must be about the *'shipping*.



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Post DHs, Rowling's dittoheads are convinced that any objections must merely be sour grapes because Rowling took the story in a direction the dissatisfied didn't like.

Read my lips. 'Shipping bores me.

From all indications it isn't all that high on Rowling's list either.

Rowling can't avoid it of course. She's dealing with 16-year-olds. Even Percy had a girlfriend when he was 16.

But her handling of this "vital issue" was such as to suggest that she thinks that the whole subject is simply funny. Or at least every bit as funny as boring old History! And her jokes on each of these subjects are every bit as insulting as her jokes on the other.

(Why, oh why couldn't Hermione have created her little beaded bag during HBP and given us a running joke that was *funny*.)

\*sigh\* And after she put in all that work in OotP to try to show us an essentially "gender-blind" society, too! (*Fugged-aboutit! Doesn't matter!*)

(ETA: 2022 and isn't THAT the truth! Taken your mask off, eh?)

Well, given that enacting the stereotype is the greater part of what Teen Love is all about, I suppose we ought to have considered ourselves warned. But then I also suppose that trying to write Teen Love in a way that will still be entertaining to 9-year-olds presents its own challenges

(What? You forgot the small fry were still with us? Hey, just because *you're* no longer nine years old...)

Having been creebing about Rowling's dismissive and disrespectful treatment of History for years, I admit that when HBP came out I got a certain mean satisfaction by this practical illustration that it is all a question of just whose ox is being gored.



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And, so far as I am concerned, she could have taken Book 7 in any number of even less promising directions than she did, and welcome, if she had made an effort to be *convincing* about it. But she didn't.



Although I will have to say that I think that publicly calling the Harry/Hermione 'shippers delusional was a bit in excess of the requirements. They had every reason to think that they were interpreting something that was actually in the story.

Even though that particular reading seems to have been primarily due to movie contamination. A lot of the H/Hr 'shippers probably saw the movies first. Which set their underlying assumptions, and even reading the books later on has never shifted them.

I mean, really. How could anyone seriously "'ship" movie!Hermione with movie!Ron? Particularly if they haven't read the books yet. It's inconceivable. And the fact that Rowling had been generally stated (by fans and studio publicists alike) to have *approved* the screenplays (whether she actually reviewed them in any kind of depth or not) just makes the perceptions they bring in from the movies seem all the more legitimate, in defiance of the actual *text*. In the movies, Harry is the Hero. Hermione is the Heroine. Of course they belong together. Ron? Who's he?

May I be honest here? I despise the movies.

The bottom line is that I heartily disapproved of the fact that the movies were being made before Rowling had finished writing the series. I was convinced that that was going to distort the





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story before it was even complete. And I was right.

And it's not like they are immortal examples of cinematography, either.

The first two were hardly more than hackwork and the third, while it was a reasonably entertaining movie, was not the *story*. And while the fourth was even more entertaining, it isn't really the whole story *either*. How could it be in only three hours, or thereabouts? (Haven't seen the rest of them and don't intend to.)

And the films are doing nothing but skewing the perception of what is actually in the books. Even if someone goes back and *reads* the books.

And I am absolutely convinced that the excessive melodrama and sloppy execution of the last three books was largely thanks to Rowling knowing that whatever she wrote was going to be filmed, according to a script that somebody else was going to write. She was "writing for the movies" and forgetting that they needed to *read as novels*.

But, then, I am a theorist, not a film critic.

And if you've been listening to me for any appreciable length of time you already know that there are no "movie-based theories" to be found on this site. And probably not more than a handful of references to the "celluloid things I try not to mention" in the collection, either.

Which one correspondent rather convincingly (and *embarrassingly*) pointed out to me is about twice the overall length of OotP. And that was even before the last books were released — which set off the generation of any amount of additional material. \*sigh\*



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One of the things that most put my nose out of joint over HBP, in addition to the above-mentioned canon inconsistencies, gender stereotypes, lazy logic, and enshrined hypocrisy, was the continuing lack of a clear distinction between Dark and Light magic and a continuing avoidance of anything that could be construed as a plausible history of her world.

On a second reading I found that she had at least finally given us *\*something\** on the order of a *hint* of what the nature of the Dark Arts presumably *is* in her world, but still no real distinction between the Dark Arts and "normal" magic. And we were still left stranded and trying to balance on the top of a "history" constructed of no more than a wobbly structure of variously silly jokes. She didn't give us *any* kind of a clarification on *that*.

Book 6 was the point — or so it seemed to me — that Rowling really needed to get down to brass tacks and explain certain fundamentals like the aforementioned distinction between Dark magic and everything else, and the underlying structure of the series' backstory. If you are presenting a story and dressing it up in the costume of being a tale of some iteration of an established conflict between good and evil, you need to define just where, for the purpose of this particular story, evil *starts*.

And she didn't. In fact, she didn't so thoroughly that I finally concluded that she didn't ever *intend* to. Which struck me as completely incredible.

The lady *allegedly* is not stupid. And for all her pose of not being a fan of quest fantasy, her knowledge of folklore seems clearly to be fairly broad, and she knows how this kind of story





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is put together. There is *always* a line drawn in the sand *some-where*, distinguishing between what is classified as “Dark” and everything else. And she still hadn’t shown us where that line is drawn in her Potterverse.

Or even *if* it is drawn. And if she hadn’t done so by that time, the omission had to be deliberate. Either she was running an experiment of her own of telling a story in which there IS no line in the sand, and leaving it up to the reader to draw it, without prompting or clues, or she had held the information back because she had a bombshell to attach to it before she lobbed it at us.

And both possibilities looked about equally likely at that point. It seemed to me that such a *fundamental* omission could hardly have been made by *accident*.

But the continuing omission caused me to finally stop crediting her with having *ever* attempted to construct a viable secondary world to set her story in. Even if she had merely done it poorly.

It’s an attempt at a fairy tale. A very long and involved fairy tale, to be sure, but still a fairy tale. The social mechanics are all pasted on. They do not *support* the society she presents, they *decorate* it. She’s tossed in various broadly-recognizable trappings as set-dressing because they evoke a mood and they looked “traditional” without any consideration as to whether they made sense in the context she was using them, or even of whether she had included the tradition which had originally produced them in her universe. There is *no* history here. And a functioning society does not just spring, fully-formed out of the void without one.

She didn’t even take the traditional low road of postulat-

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ing that her world is “just like” our world — only with magic. Because her world is NOT like our world. There are just too many indications from what she *does* tell us that her world couldn’t plausibly have got to where our world is. It didn’t start from the same *point*.

Once you go to the effort of putting yourself into it, the Potterverse often turns out to end up being as uncomfortable, and irritating, as a cheap suit. The sort which only fits where it touches. And the seams always rub.



Rowling admits some of this. Soon after the release of HBP a now rather notorious interview appeared in TIME — one which was clearly written with a quick-quotes quill by a Mr Lev Grossman.

The most objectionable statements, and there were quite a few of those, were put into Rowling’s mouth by the journalist — who obviously prided himself on *not* reading fantasy, and consequently wouldn’t recognize a valid work of fantasy if it bit him on the kneecap. He further chose to flaunt his ignorance by setting up a straw man to describe to his readers just what fantasy is; an example which was so ludicrous that it simply underscored the fact that he either is an ignoramus or was doing a determined job of *pretending* to be one. The fantasy genre is just plain not the “deeply conservative” environment of his imaginings (although the Potterverse, rather embarrassingly, seems to have turned out to be one. In spades). And there is a whole lot more to fantasy than just high quest fantasy.

This interview drew some fire when the popular author, Terry Prachett publicly (and deservedly) mocked it in a letter to the edi-



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tors. But one of the statements in that particular puff piece that really was Rowling's was the statement that *she* doesn't consider herself a fantasy author. She isn't a particularly big fantasy *fan*.

And it shows. If the Potterverse was ever really intended as a secondary fantasy world she did not do her homework. In fact she appears to have been unclear on the concept of just what the assignment even was. Great swathes of the background are simply missing, and she seems unaware of the fact. There is no well-conceived and solidly constructed secondary world to be found here. Not even close. There is no solid foundation. The whole edifice shimmies in a high wind. This is not an Alternate Universe. This is our own world as reflected in a funhouse mirror. You are supposed to *laugh* at it.

Until you finally figure out that it Just Isn't Funny.

By then I was beginning to suspect that that just may be the point.

*"I was trying to subvert the genre," Rowling explains bluntly. "Harry goes off into this magical world, and is it any better than the world he's left? Only because he meets nicer people. Magic does not make his world better significantly. The relationships make his world better. Magic in many ways complicates his life."*

Well, that's what she is *supposed* to have said.

However, I was unsure as to whether even that statement could be taken at face value. As I point out above. Rowling's wizarding world, once you look past the deliberate silliness spread thickly across the surface, really isn't funny at all. And even its own best and brightest don't seem to have that much of a grip.

...Even leaving aside the issue of how she can *possibly* claim

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that having magic "complicate the hero's life" ought to be taken as *subversive* when that has only been established as one of the *fundamental defining principles* of the whole genre of children's fantasy since the mid-19th century, I don't know.

But, truly, there isn't any more of a "secondary world" to be found here than can be found in 'THE ROSE AND THE RING'. The Potterverse, when even casually examined, hasn't much more order or continuity than the Land of Oz.

Well. Hey. Fans have spent the last 100+ years trying to come up with a "unified theory of everything" accounting for the myriad contradictions attributed to the Land of Oz. It's totally irresolvable, but it's still highly entertaining to the people who are still out there doing it more than a century later.

But somehow I'm not sure that they will still be doing that for the Potter series in 2107.



Speaking of which: over the course of the first four books Voldemort is stated as being "the most dangerous Dark wizard in a hundred years" on at least two occasions. In HBP Rowling seemed to be abandoning this reasonably balanced starting point in favor of painting him the most dangerous Dark wizard EVER. Frankly, this is *beyond* embracing the cheese. That's melodrama. It's overblown, and like a great deal of the information handed to us in HBP, it wallows in absolutes. It undermines whatever plausibility the narrative still had, which, considering that the narrative doesn't have a solid foundation to begin with, looked a lot like shooting herself in the foot.

And it's all of a piece with a far more general careening off



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into a hyperbolic, cartoon-like tone which had become pervasive over the course of HBP. By HBP, delivering the necessary plot points had become dependent upon the broad adoption of “idiot plot” devices and a general lack of balance that had gradually overtaken the whole narrative. This kind of thing ill-serves the moderately sophisticated message that Rowling *claimed* to be trying to put across, and it sells her audience short. It’s insulting. And it’s in very bad taste.

Unfortunately the problem was very definitely there. I *wasn’t* imagining it.

Nor am I the only reader to have registered it. This is the reason why so many of the readers of HBP who are in their later teens and older kept complaining that HBP “reads like fanfiction.” It does. It really does. And not even particularly good fanfiction, either. The reasoning supporting HBP is just plain immature.

Not that the earlier books didn’t also have something of fanfic about them. Like I say, that’s probably why the series has generated so much of the stuff in the first place. But one might reasonably have expected the telling to be getting *deeper* as the tale went on rather than *shallower*.



And then the final book finally came out, and that tore it.

There is a lot to complain about in the 7th book and you had better believe I intend to.

I suspect that the most disconcerting factor of DHs is that the older fans all got their noses thoroughly rubbed in the fact that Rowling absolutely wasn’t writing this story for them. And,

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indeed, never had been.

When looked at objectively, it has never been particularly clear whether Rowling was writing a series of children’s adventures, or a series of YA novels. I am forced to the conclusion that she may not realize that there is a difference. YA, after all, is a fairly recent classification of books intended for young people. But the level of reasoning required by the two styles of writing are very distinct from one another, and it is usually not at all difficult to tell which one you’ve got hold of. As one critic — I believe it may have been Orson Scott Card — put it, there are explanations that you can use in a children’s book that simply won’t work in YA (and vice-versa). One example, which may have been pointed out in Mr Card’s posting, or possibly in one that I encountered elsewhere online, was that of the four classic books of children’s stories about a certain Mrs Piggie-Wiggle by Betty MacDonald.

I *loved* the Mrs Piggie-Wiggle books as a child. All three of them. And I was absolutely delighted when a 4th book finally came out some years after I discovered them. The Mrs Piggie-Wiggle stories are all unequivocally *children’s* books with the sort of exaggerated story arcs, and over-the-top solutions which can be deployed without apology in children’s books, complete with a number of totally random, deliberately silly details, like Mrs Piggie-Wiggle’s upside-down house, which was never actually utilized for *anything*, but simply thrown in for fun. That sort of thing comes with the territory in stories written to entertain children. If you were going to be a pill and turn up your nose and point out that it wasn’t “realistic” you deserved to have people look at you as if they were wondering



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what rock you crawled out from under. “Realistic” quite obviously wasn’t the *point*.

YA, despite the temptation to dismiss it as such, is not, however, the same thing as the “teen” books that were around during the same era as the Mrs Piggie-Wiggle books. I read couple of those. They appeared to be mostly concerned about being “popular” and I gather were primarily defined by such things as reading levels and vocabulary lists. I found them terminally boring and went off to the adult side of the library to read Max Schulman or Agatha Christie.

YA, however, is not — it turns out — books that are merely *for* young adults, they are books about *functioning* as a young adult. Even as an *overly* young “adult”. (Sending a boy to do a man’s job, in other words.)

This kind of book *does* require a degree of plausible verisimilitude in any of its motivations or reactions, as well as to any of the explanations given if it is going to function as intended. It requires a high degree of emotional honesty at the very least. And it allows for a much greater potential for depth than what can typically be delivered in the classic “writing to entertain children”.

Despite the fact that there has been YA “content” scattered all through the Potter series, the first couple of books are clearly intended as children’s books. They are every bit as silly and as exaggerated as Mrs Piggie-Wiggle’s upside-down house, or her magical remedies for children’s misbehavior. But the next two Potter books genuinely aren’t a bit clear on who they are actually for, and the 5th and 6th were *almost* purely YA novels (despite the sudden attack of shallowness and the hyperbolic tone that overtook HBP).

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I was convinced that the reader was being encouraged to grow up with the protagonist. I’m sure that I was not the only reader to get this impression. The concept appeared to be reasonably clever, and wasn’t *too* badly handled.

Instead, when we reached the final book, the level and verisimilitude of the explanations given in it abruptly threw us all back into the kiddie end of the pool, complete with the classic juvenile trope of rendering every one of the adults fundamentally stupid in order to more greatly empower the kids.

Who, frankly were no longer *kids*, although they behaved like it.

Which was further compounded by the problematic fact that Rowling had by then established the practice of repeatedly dumbing Harry down at the opening of every successive book in a Sisyphean attempt to keep him perpetually starting out from exactly the same place from which he had first entered the wizarding world. i.e., That of the ignorant outsider who, not being a *part* of the problem, supposedly can look at the problem with a clear eye, in order to solve it.

Essentially she seemed to be trying to repeatedly tell us the same story, over and over, despite the fact that she still hadn’t *finished* telling it to us the *first* time.

This worked when he was 11 and 12. It has not worked as well since then. To the point that in DHs the very first thing Rowling did was to overtly erase knowledge and skills from Harry which she had depicted him using in HBP. And we *noticed* it.

Indeed, the whole premise she now suddenly appeared to be trying to establish was that after six years of a magical education, Harry Potter simply doesn’t know any *useful* magic. (Perhaps this was to keep it from complicating his life further?)



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One thing that seemed to be evident is that Rowling had reached the point of believing the media's spin on her place in the publishing firmament. That her fandom is composed of kids. *Only* the kids, and that she had no obligation to anyone *but* the kids.

She was wrong. So was the media.

Kids may certainly *be* fans, but they do not create fandoms. Nor do they perpetuate them. They do not have the focus, they do not have the time, and they certainly do not have the money or their own transportation, both of which are required if a fandom is to ever “take” and start moving under its own steam. It wasn't the *kids'* money that bought all those books, or the myriad Potter-related products, nor did we suddenly experience a worldwide outbreak of blindly indulgent parents. Many, if not most of those kids' parents had *also* become fans in their own right. This was something that they could do *with* their kids. But the fandom, as a *fandom*, was built by the fans who were in their later teens and up. *Exactly* the readers that DHs was *not* intended for.

Of course, the media has always pointed the camera firmly at the little kids, written glowing human interest stories about children and Harry Potter, and tried very hard to firmly ignore, dismiss, or mock the adults holding Potter Symposiums worldwide — to which young children are not typically admitted. But it is the adults who are the core of *any* fandom. And they are the ones who will stick around when the canon is closed.

If you haven't alienated them by then.

Much of this segment of the readership only surfaced with PoA. That seems to have been the watershed point for the series. If PoA had remained on the same level of lively juvenile

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adventure as the first two books, the Potter series would have still been a popular childrens' series. But about the only adults that it would have attracted would have been the parents of the target audience and those few random adults who simply *\*like\** to read childrens' literature. The books would probably not have become media events.

But it didn't. Rowling appeared to have something to say in PoA. And she evidently could not say it without managing to attain a level of depth which was largely absent from the two books that preceded it.

And of course the clever, and thoroughly unexpected reveal/reversal of PoA's climax certainly didn't hurt, either.



I personally have a problem in the fact that, over the years that I have been analyzing the series and trying to interpret what is going on in it, I have fallen into the habit of, wherever something appeared to make no sense, to assume that there was something that I'd missed. To conclude that there is some element that I simply did not know about, and that if I knew it, that would bring the issue into focus. That, in fact, there was an underlying order to this world even if the author was presenting it in a less than optimal manner.

But now, post-DHs, this really doesn't appear to be the case. Where something appears to have made no sense, it all too often simply doesn't make sense. There is no missing element that has been cleverly concealed. There is just nothing there. Even the Grand Contradictions are not necessarily cleverly placed clues. They may be only contradictions.



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Not that one's own reasoning may not simply turn out to be *wrong*. Regardless of however carefully one reads the material. I've certainly managed to do that. *Frequently*. I never had a higher average than one accurate guess out of three and I never expected to.

For example: I could not believe that Snape had managed to so completely win Albus's trust in the period of the 7–8 weeks that he had been teaching at Hogwarts and spying for both sides before the Dark Lord's first defeat. I felt that if Albus did really trust Snape, when he vouched for him before the Wizengamot, then the association must actually have gone farther back than that. Because, after all, such a level of trust is not so easily won.

So I built up this fine theoretical backstory of their association having been established much earlier than the date that Snape was hired as a teacher, in fact possibly before Harry was born.

And up to a point I seem to have been correct. While there is a good deal of question as to whether the meeting on the grassy knoll — excuse me, the windy hilltop — between Snape and Albus took place during the winter of '79–'80 or the winter of '80–'81, it would have hardly been taking place on a windy hilltop if it had happened at any point after Snape had already started working in Albus's school. I mean, consider; is it reasonable to suppose that Snape would have been setting up meetings on hilltops and crying out; "Don't kill me!" After he had already given Albus his penitent DE story and Albus had "forgiven him," and taken him on staff?

And when we got the "Grand Contradiction" between Albus and Sybil's accounts of the night the Prophecy was made,

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that looked like fairly convincing evidence that I was very much on the right track and that the association had possibly begun before the Prophecy was made.

Well, um, no. Or at least, not according to Rowling.

It turns out that my "Grand Contradiction" was allegedly just another commonplace contradiction. It does indeed contradict, in fact majorly, but that act of Rowling is all but totally irrelevant. That wasn't the clue. Or, rather, that is not what that particular clue was about. The real clue was just yet another little pointer to Albus's congenital habit of lying. The official story is now that Snape really did only go to Albus when he learned that Lily was at risk. The "likely story" of his repentance and Albus's forgiveness (not that it looked much like forgiveness to me, and just what authority did *Albus* have to forgive Snape for falling in with a bad crowd? What responsibility had *he* ever taken for Snape?) was only a lie in that it had actually happened a few months earlier than they both were admitting.

And with that in mind, one can now see that Albus probably did *not* truly trust Snape when he vouched for him before the Wizengamot. Albus was merely lying to the Wizengamot about the value he had gotten from Snape's assistance, because Albus knew that the problem of Voldemort was not solved, and that Snape was a tool that he wasn't finished with yet.

All of which is just sort of... *sleazy*.

And it smarts. It really does. But one cannot say that the relevant clue wasn't *there*. We watched Albus shave the truth to fit his audience all through the series. We *knew* that he lied, even when he did promise not to on *one* occasion (and then did so anyway). I just grabbed the ball and ran in the wrong direction.



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But then all of my theories are the kind of theories that a grown-up *would* come up with. I still think that any of them might make a perfectly good armature upon which to build a YA novel. (I also tend to think that some of them had better real dramatic potential than what Rowling actually gave us.) But Rowling evidently never really intended to write YA novels and I now think the ones that she gave us, or *almost* gave us, she gave us by accident.

Although I am still going to have to say that if Albus ever really did intend to suppress that Prophecy, how he ever let Severus get away un-Obliviated after he and Aberforth had him in custody is all but inconceivable. He *knew* who Snape was. He'd had the awareness of that kid's existence forced on him after the werewolf caper and he knew what crowd the boy had run with while he was at school. The Machiavellian Albus that we got in DHs would have Obliviated him in a blink. But then the Machiavellian Albus we got in DHs would have also been perfectly capable of letting Snape go ahead and report what he'd heard just in hopes of goading Tom into action.

And we all need to remember that he appears to have then hedged his bets by waltzing into the Ministry and oh-so-virtuously handing over a Prophecy record, labeled with the Dark Lord's downfall, just in case that unprepossessing youngster *wasn't* one of Tom's, in order to make sure that *somebody* would start the rumors flying.

For the same boy to suddenly show up, weeks or months later, and voluntarily just *hand* him critical information regarding Tom's decisions would have been the last thing he expected. And some of the harshness of his response may have been

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because he didn't believe it *wasn't* a feint on Tom's part. But we will never know the truth of that.

But simply being wrong about an interpretation, or even a lot of interpretations, does not explain the thoroughgoing level of affront which is surfacing among Rowling's fans in reaction to the handling of the final book of the series. Something rather basic has gone seriously awry in the underlying contract between the Author and the Reader.



On one of the boards which I used to periodically follow, there is a moderator who lives in Scotland and has a fairly wide acquaintance in Edinburgh. Among whom is a fellow who was involved in an educational training course at the same time that Rowling was training for her teachers' qualification.

The moderator relayed the information that when her associate had been helping to mark people's work on a writers' course in the early '90s, and Rowling was doing the same, she had mentioned at that time that she was working on a book about wizards and the organizer, asked; "Is it a children's book?" and she replied "Er — not really," and had actually told them that her aim was to write a series which started off looking as if it was a children's series and then got progressively darker and more adult. In a way which, according to the report, struck him and the organizer as kind-of creepy — something more than just the books growing up as the readers did.

As the moderator pointed out, her friend's anecdote may owe something to 20/20 hindsight, but it does at least raise the possibility that such an intent was always there.



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And indeed, someone is hardly going to be raising issues like slavery in Book 2, introducing soul-eating monsters used to control the citizenry in Book 3, and unmasking a complete dismissal of due process of law in Book 4 by *accident*. Something of that intent probably was always there. But, if so, the follow-through was grossly inadequate to the requirements.

If you are determined to raise such issues you really ought to show that something has been done to *address* them by the end of the story. It's your *duty*.

It's enough to make you wonder whether after the burn-out of GoF she simply let half of her intentions for the series fall through the cracks.

And for all that Rowling was now dealing with increasingly "serious" themes, when it came to the final book, she dealt with them (where she dealt with them at all) as if she were dealing with them in a book for *much* younger children than those the previous two books (indeed, the previous four books) had been written for, and *none* of the explanations or the reasoning used to justify anything in it were the sort of explanations that someone would have come up with who was "thinking like a grown-up." It was a nasty shock to the system and made a complete shambles of our expectations. For an author who claims that kids can handle serious themes and that such themes ought not to be sugar-coated for their consumption, she was certainly boiling up a large vat of syrup.

Because *nothing* in the final book was reasoned out in the manner of an adult trying to explain how the world works in a form that a child could understand it. It was reasoned out, and presented with a child's unhesitating and narrow-minded judg-

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ment that there just are Good people and there are Bad people. And that the two are simply *different*, and that you don't *have* to apply the same standards to both of them. Which simply isn't *true*. And she is old enough to *know* better.

She is *lying* to us.

If the Good people aren't perfect, she claims, it doesn't matter. No matter what they *do*, they are *still* the *Good* people.

If someone *isn't* one of the Good people, it doesn't matter what *they* do, either, even if they aren't "un-good" enough to be truly Bad. For if you only need to *care* about the Good people — and if these are *not* the Good people — then no one cares about *them*. And if you *do* care you aren't *supposed* to; they aren't the *Good* people.

And the really Bad ones are irretrievable. You're supposed to hate them because they are Bad.

And, what is more, she will tell you which ones are which, and tell you *exactly* what you are supposed to think about *all* of them.

She wasn't encouraging the Reader to deal with a concept. She was laying down the law as to *how* they were supposed to deal with it. And has continued to do so in her interviews. Which is absolutely *not* according to Hoyle.



Now, admittedly, the very last purpose of a functioning morality in entertainment fiction is to instruct. Surely its primary purpose is to reassure. Otherwise how on earth can you account for the overwhelming popularity of murder mysteries?

In fact let's leave the whole subject of books designed to be



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marketed to children out of the equation, for a moment, and focus on the central issue of depicting a functioning morality in a fictional work. The fact that children are regarded as primarily standing in need of instruction is distracting us. The central issue, for the sake of this argument, is; what is the purpose of a consistent and coherent morality in a work of fiction. Any work of fiction. Such a "morality" to be hypothetically identified within a structure made up of clearly-defined infractions and their consequences.

All of which does make mystery fiction a particularly good example for comparison purposes.

Mysteries are not written to serve the purpose of instructing readers in fine points of the law. The satisfaction delivered by an appropriate resolution of a mystery has nothing to do with having finally understood a fine point of the law. The satisfaction is from the underlying reassurance that Society upon the whole will protect its own. That whatever happens, the truth *will* ultimately come out, and that society will address wrongdoing. That, in short, Society, upon the whole is worth upholding.

An underlying hunger for "justice" appears to be a basic human impulse, and it permeates all human societies and it always has. I can assure you that "Not fair!" is a protest which the human "heart and mind" is capable of articulating at an astoundingly early age. (Recent studies postulate that this impulse however, does not appear to be present in the hearts and minds of the great apes. I will leave to the religious among us the ensuing debate as to whether this is relevant to the concept of "original sin.")

And of course it doesn't always happen that way in real life.

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But the kind of things that happen in real life do not necessarily make for satisfying fiction. And I am sure that no one really "needs" to be instructed of the fact that in Real Life, justice is not always served.

I am sure that anyone here who reads mystery fiction will at some point or other have got hold of one of those ringers where the author has decided to be "edgy," or arty and has ended the book with the perpetrator getting away undetected, and the blame falling elsewhere. There are a fair number of these out there and sometimes they are very well written and cleverly done. But while they may make the reader *think*, they tend to not be at all satisfying as mysteries.

The only time they do unquestionably succeed is when they were set up from the beginning as "Trickster" stories. In a Trickster story you quite literally *can* get away with murder. But those are not actually *mysteries*.

Which brings us to Harry Potter. Harry Potter is not a Trickster story. It is anything but. If it were, we would be rooting gleefully on Harry's side as he Crucios his enemies and makes a hash of Voldemort's plans. It would be written for humor, not melodrama, and Harry would not be dying for the sins of his world. (Which to be accurate, he wasn't doing in any case. He was willing to die to weaken his enemy. The rest of the world could do as it pleased so long as he managed to stop Tom Riddle from messing with it.)

Rowling actually did a damned fine job of depicting a society which is profoundly broken, and truly does need to be rebuilt. But the members of that society never openly admit that anything is wrong apart from there being a self-anointed Dark Lord



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running about somewhere “out there.” And the only people shown to actually have ever tried to rebuild the society are the villains, who attempt to rebuild it in their own image.

Albus Dumbledore’s decision to guide and assist his BFF Gellert’s plan to rebuild society for the “greater good” turns out to be the most wrongheaded thing he ever got mixed up in, and he soon realized it. But he never managed to rid himself of the chimera of there actually *being* a “greater good.” Hermione Granger is shown to be at least equally wrongheaded in her intention to address the plight of the enslaved House Elves. The message, inside the story, almost appears to be “Even if it is broke, *you* aren’t qualified to fix it.”

And in the epilogue, there is absolutely *not a clue* that anything ever *was* fixed. Indeed there is every suggestion that it wasn’t. *Ever*. It’s the *same* world Harry first entered in Book 1.

It is, in fact, the perfect happy ending for the trio of 11-year-olds who opened this series, before even the author had a chance to properly get to know them. Even though they all now have spouses and children, they are still only 11.

Rowling also seems to have entirely missed the whole point that if Harry is to be a useful member of this society, the whole society cannot be about *him*, even if the story was. She was better about this kind of thing earlier in the series. But by DHs, the whole universe really does apparently revolve around Harry Potter, without *any* convincing justification, and the whole thing is totally off balance.



But, c’mon, if Rowling REALLY IS so clueless that she wasn’t

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even aware that she was trying to write a fantasy until she popped in a unicorn, what do we expect? I mean, yeah, right, it’s a story about a boy wizard who doesn’t realize he is a wizard. So what is it then? Social realism? Chick lit? Oh, of course, it’s naturalistic drama with gritty hyper-realism, *obviously*. How could I mistake it for anything else?

Of course the fantasy “world” doesn’t work. She never laid a foundation for a fantasy world that would. She probably doesn’t know how to. But you would have thought that someone who is throwing together an epic which pretends to be a story of the conflict between good and evil would take the trouble to at least define those terms, for the purpose of that particular story.

Because you have to *do* that when you are writing fantasy. Particularly the kind of fantasy that includes a system of magic that *works*. The underlying physical principles of such a world are different from ours, and that is going to affect the way its people think. Admittedly, most of the scale of good to evil overlaps from fictional world to fictional world to a major degree, but the details always vary. And the line dividing the two shifts. You have to draw that line and call it out to the reader or you are simply not all going to be on the same page.

And Rowling didn’t. Right down to the last, tacky “All was well.” (which one of the other posters on Lj cheekily — and accurately — rephrased by appending; “He loved Big Brother.”) Rowling never sticks her neck out and takes a stand on where the line in the sand is drawn for this world. So consequently we get all of the characters milling aimlessly about all over the beach, with the author arbitrarily kicking sand in their faces



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because they were once rude to Harry, or she doesn't like the color or fit of their swim trunks.

So, yes, I'm miffed because I feel as if I have been deliberately cheated. It isn't that she ended the series somewhere I didn't predict. It's that I've been robbed of the whole mirage of sense and order that appeared to be present and operative over the course of the 6 previous books.

Bait-and-switch is bait-and-switch whatever else you try to call it.



And the inescapable fact is that *none* of those really serious social issues that she raised have been addressed by the end of the story. She also never laid a proper groundwork for half of what she threw at us at the last minute in the final book, and her whole vision is morally indefensible.

She has left us in a world which is wall to wall with Demen-tors, who have demonstrated that they cannot be trusted, and no one has uttered a peep about what they are going to *do* about that. House Elves are still enslaved (in fact, her hero now owns one of his very own), and you can, and indeed *should* slap a label of "irredeemably evil" on 11-year-olds for being sorted into the least popular House.

On the final page, we still have absolutely no distinction drawn between "Dark" magic and everything else. The hero succeeds in casting Cruciatius upon an enemy (probably because his author refused to let him know any *useful* magic) who was doing no more than shooting off his mouth, followed up with a tawdry little "action hero" one-liner, and is applauded as "gallant."



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The Ministry is corrupt from top to bottom, and Harry and his friends have all gone to work for it. The press is subservient to whoever yanks its chain. Tom Riddle is evidently evil because he was *born* evil, indeed was *conceived* by an act which insured that any product of it would turn out to be evil, and the wizarding world is in the worst state it has ever been in living memory. But now that Tom Riddle is finally dead everything in the garden is supposedly lovely.

And I do not believe that this can *possibly* be true.



The failure, and for me the 7th book is an EPIC failure, is not due to any of the individual elements that Rowling actually put into the book, for almost nothing that is actually in the book would be irretrievable with better handling. But she did not give it better handling. Her lack of technical writing skills, compounded by the fact that her editors apparently didn't even *try* to edit it, swamped the project entirely. It isn't that I specifically disliked the book (well, by this time it is. I've grown to *despise* this book), so much as that I simply cannot believe it. I'm still half-way waiting for the *real* Book 7.

The basic reasoning over the course of this book simply does not make *sense*, and my disbelief can no longer be suspended. And, to me, that makes this book a deal-breaker.

I did not regard "Because I say so!" as a valid explanation for anything when I was six. I am no more inclined to accept that as a valid explanation from Rowling today. And I don't bloody *care* what her dittoheads think. My opinion is just as valid as theirs.

What hurts is that I had expected the book to be clever, and





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it is not clever. And, by extension, much of what appeared to be so clever in the earlier books turns out not to have been clever, either. In far too many cases, we were not simply missing some final element that would bring it all into focus. It was just unfocused. There was no final element. It is *unfinished*.

There really was a great deal of cleverness expended on this series, but, in the end, not as much of it as first appeared was the Author's. A great deal of it seems to have been the Readers'.

Rowling can no longer be excused by inexperience — one would have hoped that by this time her skills would have improved from what they were a decade ago — but I swear the opening chapter of PS/SS has some better and certainly more subtle writing than you can find just about anywhere in DHs.

It is also a cowardly piece of work. She has created this nasty little dystopia (which turns out to have been even worse than we had realized — and we are not imagining it, it really is there) which has spontaneously generated a looming threat, which, unsurprisingly, turns out to be merely one more of a long series of similarly looming threats. She lists the underlying causes, flaps them under our noses, and then in the end she removes the current looming threat, does nothing to address the underlying causes, and expects us to believe that everything is now as perfect as it ever needs to be.

And I flatly don't believe that. And if I cannot believe her on *that*, then I am not convinced that I can believe her about *anything*.

Which runs us aground on the side issue of choices. Which really does turn out to be no more than a side issue. "Choose between what is right and what is easy." Can anyone show me

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any point in the whole series up to and including this final book in which Harry has ever been offered a legitimate choice that was "easy"? I think the distraction of whether to go after the Horcruxes or the Hallows is the first time that Harry has been offered a choice of *anything* other than the either/or of trying to stop his enemy, or to keep trying to run away, or to simply roll over and let himself be killed. Which, *act*o his author turned out to be the *right* choice after all.

Unless you want to argue that the hard choice would have been to stay out of things all the times that he was told to. In which case, *that* was a choice that he never made.

And when he was given the distraction of possibly going after the Hallows instead of the Horcruxes it only really distracted him for a couple of chapters. And then he was simply *handed* the Hallows anyway.



Which brings us to another issue, and this is one which ought to be, and in fact is, much easier to forgive. It is now abundantly clear that the series was structurally flawed from the beginning.

If this is really the conclusion that she has always had in mind — and I do think that she always had *something* like this in mind — then it is a very great pity that there was no one among her editorial team that she trusted enough to discuss her "Master Plan" for the series as a whole with beforehand. Because it now seems inescapable that she was working from a plan that was just too poorly strung together to be able to deliver a satisfying experience for the reader. And most of the problems would have been readily avoidable if she had thrashed



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it out with anyone with editorial experience beforehand.

The overriding flaw was built into that Master Plan. If, indeed, what we ended up with was, in fact, following any alleged Master Plan. The flaw was in the pacing, as dictated by the need to deliver all of the necessary information at specific points of the story. So long as she was determined to follow *that* plan, and to deliver the information where The Plan had placed the information being delivered, there was no way that the final book could help but feel perfunctory and rushed.

There was simply too much withheld information that had to be conveyed over the course of one final book for any of it to be given proper development, and we ended up wading through an infodump in just about every chapter.

For the first third of the book it was exhilarating just to *finally* be getting *answers*, but by the middle of the book this procedure started feeling altogether too easy. All of the details were simply flying into place, while the increasingly passive hero appeared to be doing nothing more than wandering aimlessly about the landscape from station to station where the universe would then generously deliver the next shipment of information, upon arrival, usually unasked.

And none of the information we were handed in DHs *wasn't* an answer. We no longer were forced to use our judgment and pick out what was relevant from what was not. *Everything* was suddenly relevant. We just had to figure out its proper *order*.

I really do think that it would have been far more effective if she had placed any number of these answers in earlier volumes.

If indeed, she did actually hold them back, and hadn't just suddenly introduced them because she had only just *thought* of them.

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Which, frankly sounds far too likely. And, in retrospect, calls the whole “urban legend” that JK Rowling has had this story planned out from the beginning into question.



Because I no longer think I believe that legend. And I for one would be more inclined to respect her intentions if she admitted as much.

I flatly don't think she had anything of the sort. She had “a” story planned out. Or *half* planned out, rather. But I doubt that it was *this* story. She had a vague idea of where she wanted to take her story. She may have even had a real outline to begin with. But she didn't have the *whole* story planned out in any kind of detail. Not even as a rough summary. There are just way too many things in the last half of the series dragged in by one hind leg at the last moment without any proper groundwork for them to have been a part of any grand Master Plan. I suspect that she couldn't place a lot of that information any earlier than she did, because she didn't *have* that information any earlier. She hadn't thought of it yet. And some of what she gave us were blatant attempts to cut corners.

For example: she could and *should* have introduced the tales of Beedle the Bard all the way back in PS/SS. The mysterious sigil of the Deathly Hallows was added to the specific copy of the book that Hermione was later given by Dumbledore, it isn't in the story. She'd have lost none of the “surprise” factor about it when we met it later.

Showing us from the outset that wizards have a *bona-fide* culture of their own, with their *own* culture heroes, and their own



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specific fables would have given away *nothing*, and it would have added immeasurably to the ambiance. It could have even turned into a running joke about whether Hermione had read Beedle yet whenever she started harping on whether the boys had read 'HOGWARTS, A HISTORY'. And it would have certainly have provided at least an illusion that she and Ron might have had *something* in common if they each were willing to read something. Even if Ron did primarily read for entertainment, and Hermione for information.

Grindelwald has been now presented as having not ever been that big an issue in Britain. Consequently, there is no reason for us not to have known at least *that* much of his general context earlier. There is no reason for the kids to have known he had adopted the sigil of the Hallows as his mark until Krum showed up to tell them about it, exactly when he did. And they would still have needed to find Xeno Lovegood to get the explanation of what the sigil *meant*, possibly even to reread the story of the brothers. But Xeno wouldn't have needed to bring the whole narrative to a screeching halt in order to explain where it came from. We would have already had a context for it.

For that matter we really ought to have had a scene somewhere in the first five books where Professor Binns completely dismisses the existence of the Deathstick, exactly as he did the Chamber of Secrets. Perhaps even in the same passage in which he dismissed the Chamber. And, having dismissed it, let it come back to bite us when it needed to, instead of lobbing it in from left field, adding yet another WTF? moment to a book that already had far too many of them.

I mean, really, Gregorovitch's name (first mentioned in GoF)

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was dropped into the opening of chapter 7. I recognized it, even if Harry didn't. Would it have spoiled anything for us to have had the means of figuring out just which wand Tom was searching for a few chapters before Harry did? I think we'd have had much more fun watching him finally make the connection if we had all been waiting for him at that particular finish line.



And when you stop and take a closer look, it is clear that this whole problem has been present in the series for a long time. It's almost as if when Rowling returned to the project after the 3-year summer, she had forgotten half of who these people were and what they were doing. She certainly had lost momentum. I can't say that she really ever got it back.

And given that the woman has actually been noted as claiming that she doesn't reread her own books after they are published, I rather suspect that the above is no less than the case. (Q: what kind of an incompetent and vainglorious twit actually makes such a claim — or boast — in the middle of what is turning out to be a series of the length and complexity of Harry Potter, for ghod's sake? Does the woman have any notion of the *caliber* of impression she is making?)

And as I pointed out above, even before DHs came out, the books no longer "connected" with one another.

This was not always the case. Books 1–4 flow in an unbroken narrative. Each one smoothly segues into the next with a feeling of the inevitable. You can look back from the end of Book 4 to the beginning of Book 1, and for all the surprises and plot twists that you will have navigated, you can now see that it is



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really all one straight line. There is no point at which you are even tempted to say; "But if they had done this, at that point then the story would have gone there." One can raise no viable question about where Rowling had taken the narrative to that point. Even the persistent creebing about the faulty and ludicrous premise of suddenly reviving the whole TriWizard Tournament to no real purpose which underlies the central action of Book 4 does not add a great deal of resistance to where Rowling chose to take the story. For all the gaffes and glitches, the story was still \*all one story\*.

OotP starts with a lurch and then goes nowhere that anyone anticipated. I do not know about the fandom as a whole but I felt a distinct shift in direction between GoF and OotP. The story of OotP is not the same story as the story from Books 1–4, it reads as merely one of the directions that the story *might* have taken from that point. It's a *viable* direction. But it is only one of many.

And this shift of perception only gets harder to ignore as we move on to Book 6 and, finally, to Book 7. Virtually nothing in these books was of any *real*, continuing *use* to us.

There were SO many things that seemed to be flagged with little "Heads-up! This is *important!*" post-its in OotP which were summarily dismissed or ignored in HBP that it was positively insulting. Not to mention aggravating.

It took most of another year before I finally worked out a reasonably satisfactory hypothesis that the disorientation that HBP left a lot of us in was because in HBP Rowling had not continued the arc from OotP, she had finally introduced the other half of the problem.

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So I suspected that in Book 7 she would be interlacing the two halves together. Or at least that appeared to be a plausible hypothesis, before we actually had to deal with DHs. HBP was disorienting because it was completely non-linear with the story arc as we had been (sort of) presented it in the first five books.

Well, no such luck. Book 7 came even more out of left field than Book 6. Either the whole thing had run away from her or Rowling was lying as smoothly as Albus when she told us all that Books 6 & 7 were two halves of one story. (Which she had.) For they certainly read as nothing of the kind.

Of course, she had also told us that close to a year before she actually sat down to write Book 7. So it may have gotten away from her in the process. Or maybe she just *forgot* they were supposed to be two halves of the same story. She hasn't said anything about Books 6 & 7 being two halves of a whole *lately*.

I rather think that GoF was the last thing she wrote to any Master Plan. If, indeed, there ever really was one.

And at that, as a number of the well-known names in "meta" fandom, such as Sister Magpie, have pointed out, by the end of GoF she seems to have simply run out of story.

Can you name anything, anything at all that she brought up in GoF (apart from the Pensieve) which ever came back and served a real purpose?

Did the students of Hogwarts actually form any kind of meaningful ties of friendship with the foreign students? Hardly. Was anything advanced by reviving the TriWizard Tournament that particular year, apart from introducing us to a couple of characters who played minor walk-on parts later in the series?



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Nope. Was Hagrid and Madam Maxime's mission to the Giants of any use to the plot whatsoever? Did the giants' allegiances even matter in the long run? Even less. Did we learn anything in that book at all which had any more lasting consequences than to resolve the issues raised in the storyline of that *same book*?

Not that I could see, either. The book existed for one purpose and one purpose only, and that was to bring Tom Riddle back into the material world. The only other things in the whole 734 pages that have any authentic resonance were the falling out between Harry and Ron, and the introduction of the news media and its impact on public perception.

That's a hell of a lot of something that turned out to be empty padding.

But the fact is that, despite a couple of hints, after GoF it became a rarity for relevant information to actually be based upon something that Rowling had already introduced in the first four books of the series, too. And that just *doesn't* sound like a comprehensive plan to me. Particularly not when just about everything that was *in* those first four books interconnected.

Rowling claims that she fell into a plot hole in Book 4, and she claims that she examined "the Plan" for 3 months before she actually started writing OotP, to make sure that there weren't any other such holes in it waiting for her.

But, realistically, from what we've seen of her more recent conduct, her switching of claims as to what her main characters did between the great battle and the epilogue, and serial contradictions, does this really sound like a woman who is going to let herself get pinned down to *anything*. Particularly once she's found a bug in her soup.



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I think she threw the original plan out altogether. And I do suspect it had already shifted somewhat from whatever it had originally been by then. Hell's bells, in one of her earliest variations James and Lily had *stolen* the Philosopher's Stone. They stole it from the thieves who had stolen it from the Flamel's, but still... And although she remembered bits of the "Plan," she's been winging it ever since. She has certainly been winging it in her interviews.

Think about it. There really does seem to have been a coherent story arc over the course of books 1–4. Books 5, 6, & 7 have all referred back to various things that we first met in the first 4 books, but the action does not appear to lead directly from any of them. There was an inevitability to the segue from PS/SS to CoS. Those books read like a connected pair. It is blatantly obvious that PoA and GoF are also a connected pair. For that matter, even CoS and PoA appear to slide smoothly from one to the next.

But none of the 3 later books seems to start where things were left at the end of the previous one. They all lurch into action, talking about what had gone on before, but they don't feel particularly *connected* to it, it's as if with each of them Rowling started over from scratch with a checklist and a blank slate, and then each book goes off in a different direction. They don't even try to follow an established trajectory.

The Frank Bryce viewpoint at the opening of GoF didn't materially interrupt the flow of story, but 'The Other Minister' did. 'Dark Lord Ascending' certainly did. But even OotP with its Harry-centric opening ought to have given us a bit more information about what was going on, and what we were in for





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than we got. What on earth would have been lost if Harry had *read* the damned PROPHET and noticed the smear campaign against himself and Dumbledore, instead of having to have it explained to him by Hermione? How dumb is he?

Instead Harry, and we, got thrown back into cluelessness so Rowling could replay the plot from PS/SS.

If she did that on purpose — and it seems a bit much to claim that she did it by *accident*. But she certainly did it. And what did she accomplish by it? Other than to suggest a bit of cleverness about an overriding story arc that she had no intention of following through with? We certainly didn't need to replay PS/SS. We'd already been told that story. But now we'd been told it again, and this time it pointed us in a whole new direction — one in which Rowling had no intention of taking us. The Veil? The locked room? *Fugeddaboutit!*

Indeed, what she has done with each of the last 3 books is to throw us (and Harry) back to square 1 and then to go roaring off in an entirely different direction until we hit the internal wall. And it's annoying. None of these books actually fit into the same "arc" as the first 4. And nothing that we learn in any of them can be counted upon to be applicable anywhere *but* in those specific books. (With the exception of the laquer cabinet. That one stuck around for two whole books.) These stories are all essentially disposable, and filled with dispensable elements of no lasting relevance.



We openly were getting only a fraction of the available information in OotP. And we never did get filled in on what

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Dumbledore was really up to that year, any more than we were ever filled in on the purpose of his first elaborate scam over the course of PS/SS.

There are chunks of background that are just as large missing from HBP. And each of the last four books in the series have included a major distraction to keep us from focusing too closely on the things that are missing.

In GoF the TriWizard Tournament was the appointed distraction. It was a distraction that the rest of the action was tied to, but it still was obscuring the issue of what was Voldemort up to this time.

In OotP Umbridge and her attempt to take over the school was the distraction, and it was a *complete* distraction, sitting squarely in the foreground. We have no evidence to suggest that the DEs sent her to Hogwarts to do that, although it certainly suited their purposes to let her go ahead and try. We never even learned whether her attempt to get Harry expelled was really an attempt to get one of the brother wands snapped and out of commission. It could have been. But we were never told so. The whole issue is still completely up in the air.

And the presentation was overwhelmingly over the top.

If being over the top is a hallmark of a deliberate distraction, then the intentional distraction of HBP was the silly Teen Lurve sub-plot.

Rowling even brought up a Dorothy L. Sayers quote, in the combined interview back in July 2005 when the book came out (that love interest has little place in a detective story apart from serving as a red herring). She went on to say that she did not completely agree, but that hardly means that she couldn't have



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slipped a ringer into the collection of overheated pairings on display over the course of the book. We evidently were being invited to think so.

But most of the new info in HBP really did seem to come out of nowhere. And most of it *led* nowhere too. And it threw us off track for months. Which was probably the intention.

Or set us on a different track. Consequently, DHs hit us broadside and knocked us completely for a loop.

In DHs the overriding distraction was the personal history of Albus Dumbledore.

Which had absolutely *nothing* to do with the central problem of that book. It was irrelevant. Albus Dumbledore's youthful errors made NO discernible contribution to the problem of Tom Riddle's Horcruxes. Nor did it offer any illustration of what must be done to address that problem. The only thing it did was to finally clarify into just what context we ought to file the nagging detail of what Grindelwald had ever had to do with anything. (Answer: very little.)

And the whole purpose of all the navel-gazing over what did Albus *mean* and whether Harry should *still* trust him appears to have been to keep the reader occupied and distracted so they wouldn't notice that the story was going absolutely nowhere for months on end.



Which brings up another problem which, although tiresome, is at least easy to forgive.

She kept trying to "do it again." When it no longer worked.

She stunned and delighted us with the revelation/reversal at

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the end of PoA.

Then she turned around and did it again with Polyjuice! Moody and Animagus! Rita.

She may have wanted to surprise us all like that again, but by that time we were on to her. So, instead, she kept laying down all of those false threads which went nowhere, and withholding information which did not need to be withheld, in order to keep us from being able to figure anything out. It reached a point in DHs where these repeated minor "Ta-da!" revelations started coming across like a small child leaping out from behind the sofa and crying; "Boo!" (For the 42nd time.)

In itself it was relatively harmless, but all of those dangling loose ends still waving in the breeze at the end of the adventure are unsatisfying, and the unnecessary withholding of information contributed mightily to the train wreck of DHs.

(She really could have put Grindelwald in his proper historical context without bringing up his early connection with Albus. Or his connection to Bathilda Bagshott, which is just as intriguing, if not more so.)



The crash and burn in the middle of GoF bought her the release from a deadline for OotP due to incipient burnout (which I no longer think was incipient At All), back in 2000. And a frivolous lawsuit over the origin of the term "Muggle" bought her a bit more time. And I don't doubt that she needed every bit of that time to regroup. But the 3-year summer broke the momentum for the series, and she never got it back, possibly because she has since taken at least one year off between each



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book. And to me it really does read to me that each book was a whole new project, not a continuation of the series as it stood.

But even though she allegedly didn't have a deadline for OotP, I cannot believe that she didn't have one for HBP and DHs. She was expected to knock each of those puppies out in a year, and her publishers set the release date for the tightest time physically possible for production after she turned in each manuscript. Regardless of what was in it. And I really suspect that by that time, given the media phenomenon, what was actually *in* the manuscript was the least of everyone involved's concern. The final two books, indeed, possibly the final three books are neither plot-driven nor character-driven. They were *market-driven*.

And, really, all three of these last books truly needed more than a year each to "knock out". (Yes, probably even HBP which is the simplest of the three.) And they should have been planned out as a set, not individually. I flatly DO NOT believe that these books were written to any "Master Plan" from 1995. Regardless of how many elements from that alleged plan might have been eventually incorporated into them.

Yes, we should, indeed, all be grateful to JK Rowling for the opportunity for all the hours of entertainment that she and her publishers have provided. But if she had never written another word after GoF the fandom would have been just about as active. And the interpretive possibilities a good deal more varied.

And we can anticipate many more of hours of entertainment to come if we simply agree to dismiss the final 759-page "fuck you" note. Rowling's attempt to rewrite the concept of Authorship and to maintain a stranglehold upon both the work and the

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Readers' free interpretation of it is not in anyone's best interests in the long run, least of all her own.

The Fanficers will dismiss it, and quite possibly her, eventually. They will have to if the fandom is not to stagnate. In fact any number of them already have dismissed the epilogue, or Snape's death, or both. Heaven knows there are enough examples of fans producing do-overs of the previous books. Telling the story from other characters' viewpoints, or telling them from the PoV that Harry was Sorted into Slytherin, or what all. Eventually we will get others stating that with all due respect, one does not believe or accept the load the hooey that is DHs, and they are doing their own alternate 7th book, thank you.

They certainly aren't likely to give us a weaker one.



Frankly the whole 7th book *reeks* of burnout to me. No the whole thing didn't completely go down in flames. There are a couple of decent bits of writing and a few sort-of good bits of action in there. Even some ideas that aren't altogether contemptible, and would have been downright good if any time or effort had been expended on giving them any kind of proper development.

It is also evident that there were a handful of scenes in DHs where it was abundantly clear that Rowling has been dying to write them out for years.

But, in the main, the puppets were badly lit and are clearly made of wood. They're too garishly painted, and their strings show. Everyone in the whole book turns out to be dumb as a box of rocks except in the rare cases when it was required



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by the plot that they generate some of their own information rather than just be sitting around and waiting for the universe to deliver it to them.

But in the land of burnout that all just greases the wheels for delivering us to the finish line as quickly as possible. For all that the book is some 750+ pages, I felt rather as if I was being given the bum's rush.

Seventeen years is a long time to be on the same project, and I think that Rowling, as much as the fandom, was more than ready to have the canon closed on this one, by then.



So. I admit to being something more than merely *disappointed* with DHs. Although I also have to admit that I cannot really say that I was surprised. I feel that Rowling had lost control of the story some time earlier and her attempt to corral it back into some former concept was a mistake. It felt like she was trying to cram it back into a box in which it no longer fit.

And this is not necessarily because of any one element that is actually in the book. As I say, so far as the actual elements and devices that Rowling deployed go, there is very little in this book that would be irretrievable in the hands of an author with even slightly better skills and a good deal more respect for either her characters or her audience. And more energy to put to the effort.

In retrospect, it ought to have become obvious with OotP that Rowling had no real respect for her characters' integrity. I am not referring to the fact that there doesn't seem to be a one of them who would recognize an ethic (professional or

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otherwise) if it jumped out of a bush and bit them. I am referring to the fact that when she returned to the series after the 3-year summer, she abruptly started giving them personality transplants from one book to the next in order to facilitate the whims of the plot *du jour*.

Apart from Sirius Black, who was never the same character twice, there is not one hint of this kind of arbitrary re-characterization in books 1–4. Every bit of characterization in books 1–4 is absolutely consistent and spot-on. And I think that by this time we can safely dismiss any statements made in interviews regarding OotP in which she attempts to claim that so-and-so was *always* like that, you just didn't *notice*. She shaves the truth with a fineness unmatched by anyone this side of Dumbledore.

No. So-and-so was *not* like that because you never *showed* us that, Ms Rowling. In fact, in far too many cases, you showed us something else *altogether*. And now you are simply trying to brazen it out, and *I don't believe you*.

Rowling has already demonstrated during the post-release of DHs blitz of personal appearances that she cannot stick to one story for two days running, so I don't know why I am supposed to trust what she told me yesterday any more than I trust something she told me four years ago. Particularly when what she told me yesterday contradicts it — *as well as* what she's telling me *today*. From where I am standing, any credibility JK Rowling ever had with me, she had squandered over the first couple of weeks of DHs post-release appearances.

If the characters had still been “real” to her when she took them up again, or had ever truly been “real” to her in the first place, she would never have done that, because the characters



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would have been *themselves*, and to change them would have meant they were suddenly someone else. You do not substitute a different character in their place and claim that this is the same character if you respect integrity of “character.”

Admittedly, sometimes an author will make a false start with a character, usually a subordinate character, particularly in what is turning out to be (or was always planned to be) a series. But once you figure out who the character actually *is*, you leave them alone.

You certainly do not remove the first substitute and replace it with another one in the following book once the temporary needs of the plot have been served. To jerk them around at the demands of each individual book the way she has been doing over the whole last three books equates to something that looks amazingly like Rowling writing authorized fanfic of her own earlier work.

In DHs we definitely seem to have been handed the classic fanfic trope of; “Harry Potter had changed a lot over the summer.” He’s started listening to the voices in his head, and they have been telling him the answers.

Because no. It turns out that it wasn’t *just* Ginny, or Draco or Snape (or Sirius Black). DHs was character assassination of just about everyone it touched upon, as we *thought* we knew them, from the get-go. The only people who escaped this particular bloodbath were Neville (who won the sweep. We get to keep the “new” Neville) and Luna, who just calmly went on being Luna. Harry ended up inheriting most the benefits, but even he isn’t the *same* character we’d seen before, and while Hermione was written mostly favorably (i.e., Hermione-Sueishly) *she*

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wasn’t the quite same character we thought we knew *either*.

Plus, of course, every character we had been depending upon to perform some supporting function in the series was rendered stupid, weak, and ineffectual. No one was permitted to accomplish *anything* but Harry and the other exceptions. Or not unless Harry generously stepped back and *let* them (onstage yet!), or unless it was presented to us in a manner that was so totally implausible that we didn’t believe it anyway. Or it happened offstage and didn’t really matter because it was overshadowed by Harry’s suddenly monumental awesomeness.

Whoever it was who first summed the formula up as; Rowling is to Harry as Petunia is to Dudley, was on the right track.

And Harry himself was basically eviscerated in DHs, forced to sit there like a lump agonizing over Albus’s motives (which frankly no longer mattered about anything) and do *nothing* but wait for his author to keep delivering *answers* to him. Just about every time he actively tried to take charge of his fate and do something toward his assigned goal, he ended up in a worse mess than before. Cumulating in Rowling’s post-release statement that Harry’s great victory in this book was in finally choosing NOT to act. Oh, well there’s words to live by, apparently.

(What’s that about getting the leaders we deserve? Rôle models, too. “Don’t just *do* something! Sit there!”)

The smoke is gradually clearing to the degree that I am coming to the conclusion that even if Rowling is not as clever as she thinks she is, that she really was trying to do a couple of fairly clever, if not altogether appropriate things with the series, and she ended up doing them in a half-arsed manner.

Even though she *used* to claim that they *weren’t* exactly



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children's books, she seems to have forgotten just how naive kids can be and that they really need a nudge to give them the message that it's okay to notice that there are things *wrong* with the Potterverse. That maybe it really *isn't* such a wonderful place, even if Harry happens to think so. But instead she strews the dirt and leaves over the pitfall, wanders off and never checks back to see whether anyone has fallen in. Rather like Tom and his sea cave.

But the multitudinous continuity glitches (worse than in any other book in the series), numerical errors, blatant contradictions to the earlier books, internal contradictions with other things in the *same* book, morphing magic that suddenly behaves entirely differently from the way she had already set it up, years ago, and then shifts further every time she brings it up again, plot holes, logic holes, and all of the rest of the endless parade make me very cross, and convinces me once again that the editorial team never even bothered to actually *edit* the book at all. An author who respects the audience would not expect the audience to simply sit there and accept such a shoddy piece of construction. It's insulting.

Unless, of course, it was intended to be a satire.

And as a satire DHs *almost* works. It just isn't quite as over-the-top, in the proper directions, as it needed to be for everyone to figure out (and to be certain) what it was that the author was doing. But then, who writes satire *as* satire for nine-year-olds?



I was in correspondence with a youngster in Greece for a

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month or so after the book came out, and in the course of it I did a pretty fair bit of grouching about the shoddiness of DHs. But the exchange forced me to think a bit more critically about what it is that really bugs me about Rowling's so called "conclusion" to the series. Here is part of what surfaced:

There is of course the minor problem which I went into above, where with each book Rowling kept laying out more and more potential threads for further developments without ever making a clear decision of which ones she was actually going to use. And in the end she doesn't seem to have used any of them. By the end, there were simply far too many of these dangling threads left fluttering in the breeze for the story to feel properly "complete."

A well-known and well-loved political columnist, the late Molly Ivins once wrote an editorial which explored this problem. I do not recall just what the main subject of her editorial was, but in it she brought up the example of people who keep deferring making any kind of a decision about anything, thereby "keeping their options open" and in the end, they find they have nothing to show for it but... unchosen options. They have ended up cheating themselves. I think that Rowling did a variant of this, but it ends up feeling a bit as though she has cheated us as well, even though I am pretty sure that the whole process was *mostly* unconscious.

And, at the point at which she had to finally buckle down and tie the whole thing off it all came apart on her, and left us with nothing but fragments.

Stringing a story out requires a rather different skill set than finishing one off satisfactorily. And Rowling is hardly the only



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writer who doesn't quite have it. There are a lot of authors out there (and not just children's or YA fantasy authors, not by a long shot) who can put together some perfectly marvelous stories and yet not be able to bring them to a really satisfactory conclusion. Some of my favorite authors fall into this category, too. It sometimes feels like the story simply didn't want to end there, and the author merely wrestled it to the ground.

But the fact remains that the 7th book is simply not a worthy conclusion to the series as it had developed. And if DHs is to be taken as any deliberate or purposeful indication, then the series, as it had developed to that point, turns out *not* to actually be what we had always been led to *believe* the story was always supposed to be about.

I really do believe the series as a whole was far stronger and much more coherent at the end of HBP (despite all of the problems inherent in *that* book, and there were *plenty* of them) than it is now. With DHs, the whole story arc lost focus. All the more so in that Rowling suddenly chose to concentrate on a single issue, and one which although it had certainly been *present* in the series from the beginning, had never been framed as primary to the story's action.

She pretended for six books that this story was another (hopefully) classic tale about the eternal conflict between good and evil.

It isn't.

Ultimately the story is "about" coming to terms with death.

Coming to terms with death is not the premise upon which Rowling sold me this story. And if she had tried to sell it to a publishing house on that premise, I suspect it would probably

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have never sold at all.

That premise has nothing to do with either good or evil. There really *is* no "line in the sand." The whole issue of good vs. evil is *irrelevant* to it, and neither Tom Riddle's misguided goal to evade death, or Albus's equally misguided desire to master it, have anything to do with either good or evil, *either*.

Albus was *foolish* for wanting to collect Death's "hallows" — 2 of which Death allegedly created expressly for the purpose of *trapping* people. Doesn't Albus realize that? Well, no, obviously. *He* claims to think that the Peverill brothers *invented* the hallows. Although he doesn't seem to offer any comprehensible idea for *why*, and wanted them in order to master it. His goal was certainly not "good." And Tom's equally foolish desire to evade death is not in itself inherently evil. And to position either one of these goals as being anything like it, is totally bogus.

The story turns out to have simply NOT ever been about what Rowling spent years *pretending* it was about. The story was NEVER about good prevailing over evil. It was never about making *right* choices over *easy* ones, OR about tolerance, or questioning authority. It is about; do what you will, Death eventually comes to all. And, evidently, of learning to meet it with resignation.

Both Albus and Snape ultimately managed that. Albus with a full year's advance warning and preparation, and no other choice on offer, really. Particularly so long as he could stage-manage the whole production to his own satisfaction. Snape did so with no hesitation or reluctance whatsoever — once Harry miraculously turned up by authorial fiat, at the 59th minute of the 11th hour, and enabled Snape to get Albus's



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final message through to him, he was *done*.

And Harry eventually managed the task as well, when given sufficient outside help and support (and no viable other options, either, or none which would allow him to save face), as well as the tacit promise that to permit his own murder *really would* help to take down Tom. Tom, predictably, never learned it at all. ("He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.")

But **THIS** is, in fact, what the whole 7th book was about, and all the lip service, grand gestures, and going through the motions over some supposedly eternal conflict between good and evil turn out to be just so much set-dressing and related hogwash. It's now finally clear why Rowling never bothered to define the point at which evil begins. The issue simply doesn't matter in the long run. Not in *this* universe.

In the end, Tom Riddle's actual acts do not matter either. Nor does it matter *whatever* his philosophy might have turned out to really be. He could be the deepest-dyed villain or the most shining saint, and it wouldn't make a bean's worth of difference. His ultimate crime was to believe that he was so "special" that he could evade death, and the 7th book was where Rowling finally stopped farting around, took the gloves off, and proved otherwise.

The whole, overriding story arc of the 7th book was to bring death to Tom Riddle, and to force him to accept it. The whole DE set-up is no more than local color, the Battle of Hogwarts is sound and fury signifying absolutely *nothing*. Rowling doesn't give a damn about this world, or the state she's left it in. The minute that Tom's AK rebounded, the story was over. Even



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Harry himself no longer really mattered, and throwing him a sloppy epilogue bone of tidy future domestic happiness cost the author absolutely nothing. It was completely gratuitous.

I've said it for years: the villain is the story. This time that observation seems to be true on a whole different magnitude from the way the matter usually works in a fantasy adventure, but it is absolutely the truth.



And now I am going to be **REALLY** uncharitable.

If you cannot handle that I suggest you stop reading. **NOW.**

I do not feel that Rowling has done her job, which was to *convince* us that what she *intended* to convince us of actually happened in the books.

The thing that no one seems to be remembering is that just because the books have become a media event, it does not follow that they will *remain* a media event.

In point of fact they will not. Because that is the nature of entertainment media. It has a phenomenally short memory. Once the hoopla is over, and the circus moves on, all we are going to have is the books. And the answers simply Are Not There.

The very caliber of the questions that Rowling has been having to field in the post-release interviews makes it absolutely unavoidable to realize that the answers aren't there.

30 years, 40 years down the track, if a kid wanders into the library and picks up Harry Potter, he isn't going to have access to the interviews. They probably won't even still be online. All it would take is one technological advance from magnetic storage media and \*poof\* there all the present online content goes.





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And where is that going to leave him?

Rowling's job was to convince us of her vision over the course of the story, and she didn't do it. The final installment as she presented it to us is not convincing and it drags the whole series down the hole with it.

It's a damned shame to see so promising a project end up wrecking itself on a sandbar of inexperience and poor planning, lack of editorial support, and distraction by media hype, but that seems to be what has happened. The story of Harry Potter isn't a self-contained piece of literature, it is a "product".

The entertainment media produces products. It does not generate literature. And in the case of the Harry Potter series the entertainment media had overwhelmed the project by the year 2000.

But, that's exactly what the marketing sharks wanted, isn't it? Somebody involved in this production had the instincts of a true huckster from the very beginning. All the way back at Bloomsbury. That was obvious years ago. I don't know whether this was Rowling herself, and in fact it was probably not, but she happily went along with it.

The earmarks of the essential shift in emphasis aren't things like an inexperienced author letting Scholastic re-title her first book for the American market. That has happened to a lot of authors, and not all of them were inexperienced. Nor was it even the agreement to sell Warners' the movie rights before she had finished writing the story arc. Warners' only came sniffing around once the books had *already* become a media event. And there was no guarantee that they would hang around and be back. It was make the deal now, or take the

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chance of missing the wave.

And most of the other decisions that were made were also made for other reasons than just building up the hype.

Admittedly falsifying her own name in order to sell the books to the parents of little boys is symptomatic of the huckster mentality. Not that Rowling is the only author to have ever agreed to do it. In fact it's a common practice in some genres.

Stopping for the 3-year summer exactly when the story arc had reached it's pivotal point, while the hype for the first movie could take up the slack, and the online fandom (and the fanfic community) took off like a rocket, simply couldn't have been timed better than it was for "growing a following." And when the production of the books resumed we were now given a full extra year between each book to grow it further. If the books had resumed the 1 year = 1 book schedule (assuming that it was even possible, which I do not think it was by that time) the market would have simply sat back and waited for the story to be finished for them. Not kept trying to roll their own.

But that was all after the fact. The really relevant decision that I'm thinking of was made farther back. *Almost* at the beginning. Between Books 1 & 2.

And it's this: no one ever put a gun to Rowling's head and forced her agree to use the financial circumstances under which she wrote the first book, for publicity.

And the fact that she agreed to do so should probably not be overlooked. She and her publishers had every reason to know what kind of attention that would be drawing. They only underestimated the scale of the response.

She had already sold the first book. Bloomsbury paid her a



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pittance. She couldn't live on it. But the book was a moderate success. She may not have made a lot of money on that first sale, but the book had somehow managed to connect with a lot of "reluctant readers" so it was making a bit of a stir. There was no real question of her not being able to sell the next volume of the series. And she got the bright idea to go to the Scottish Arts Council to apply for a grant to help support herself while she wrote the next one.

So was it *altogether* necessary to make *quite* such a parade of being an unemployed single mother on public assistance who made good in order to finish writing the next volume?

But it may very well have been necessary in order to turn the story of where the books came from into a cultural legend, make a grab for the big brass ring, and to turn her, personally, into a celebrity — even if she may have regretted doing it later, she certainly agreed to do it. And she certainly knew that becoming a celebrity was a hot possibility.

In short, they didn't market the *books*. They marketed *her*.

And I don't believe they would have attempted to do that, nor, I think, would a series of supposedly children's books have morphed into a series of media events without one critical factor.

In her late-20s/early 30s Ms Rowling was highly photogenic.

One rather wonders how many of the fans (let alone the media) would have had their attention caught by the Potter books at all, without the notoriety of that fine, romantic story of the pretty young divorcée on public relief, with her baby and her book.

And in the face of that, it's very hard to completely accept that to "create literature" was ever really the primary purpose

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of the exercise, on the part of the publishers.



I keep thinking back to that Lev Grossman interview in 2005.

Grossman clearly had an axe of his own to grind against fantasy literature in general, disparaging it as "deeply conservative" and apparently neither admitting nor realizing that there was anything more to the genre than High Quest Fantasy in the tradition of several decades of Tolklones. That Rowling's work appears to be even more "deeply conservative" in its outlook than Tolkein's ought really to be mildly embarrassing to all concerned by now. But I suspect that in this case the usual subjects are all effectively shameless.

But Rowling did make that one clear statement, about wanting to "subvert the genre." Even if she did follow up that statement with the somewhat confusing example of Harry discovering that magic didn't make the world any better.

I couldn't make any sense of that statement at the time. The trope of magic complicating the protagonist's life has been around since *at least* the days of Mrs Molesworth, and it was certainly solidly-entrenched by the time of E. Nesbit, who is an author that Rowling at least admits to having read.

But downstream of DHs I began to wonder whether she may have meant exactly what she said.

It looks like fantasy, and it quacks like fantasy, but it sure the hell doesn't walk like fantasy, and it isn't a bit watertight. In fact, it sinks like a stone.

There just is no properly-built fantasy world here, and in view of her statement above, we need to consider that there never



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was intended to be. And if there was not, what *was* intended?

C'mon, she somehow managed to never draw any clear line between Dark magic and all the rest? Never told us where evil *begins*? That just plain isn't that easy to avoid.

I stopped thinking it was accidental by the time we got to HBP. Fantasy damned well requires that demarcation in its setup. And she still was holding out on us, despite Snape's little hint, which didn't really settle the issue.

She also tap-danced past resolving just about any of the social issues that she had raised AND POINTED OUT TO THE READER, nor made even the *slightest* attempt at tying off three-quarters of the loose ends that she kept laying in and waving under our noses. She doesn't explain why half of the things that suddenly got dumped into the final book even happened. She didn't bother to establish a moral center to the bloody thing. Just about the *only* promise she delivered on was to get rid of Tom Riddle.

After she spent 6 books making sure that we all understood perfectly well that Tom Riddle is *not* the worst problem the ww has.

Never mind the characters suddenly being dumber than their little sticks of wood and acting like a pack of fools.

This is the book in which Rowling takes the world she built up over the course of six previous books and systematically *breaks* it, before she closes the canon and then, as the Author, turns it over to us. (Or was *supposed* to. She didn't seem to be altogether clear on *that* concept either.)

That sure looks a lot like subverting the genre to me. In fact subverting the whole principle of Authorship, too.

So, she could be a *very* confused newbie who bit off more than she could chew, and was abandoned by her editors, or just

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a total fool, OR she has been stringing us along for years, told the editors they could all take the month off when she turned the ms in, and is laughing up her sleeve at all of us.

Factor in the kind of "excuse" answers she provided in her post-release interviews, including the way that she didn't stick to one story for more than two days running, and I was coming to a highly uncharitable conclusion as to which. She knows damned well that those interview answers are never going to count as a part of the canon.

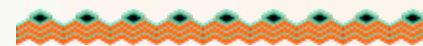
And it's a dirty trick to play on a generation of little kids who trust you. Even if they don't realize that they've been scammed.



Actually, what I really suspect is that by the time she was staring down the need to actually sit down and write DHs, she was *beyond* completely fed up with Harry Potter and everything to do with him.

In short, I no longer think that DHs!Harry was predominantly written as a brainless and passive lump by accident.

I think she'd have happily pushed him off the footpath above the Richenbach Falls if she thought she could have got away with it. With prejudice.





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## Colophon

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